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A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Bartók

Bagatelles, Op 6 Sz38. Two Romanian Dances, Op 8a Sz43. Hungarian Peasant Songs, Sz71. Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs, Op 20 Sz74. Mikrokosmos, Sz107 - Vol 6: Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm

Terry Eder *pf*

MSR Classics © MS1410 (78' • DDD)



Bartók's music for piano is unmistakably music by Bartók. In its harmonic language,

quirky and poetic gestures, and folk influences, these works could not have been written by any other composer. Terry Eder, who has studied Bartók for decades, brings out the distinctive qualities in a generous portion of the Hungarian composer's piano music, including the *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm* from the 153-piece collection known as *Mikrokosmos*.

As with much of what he wrote for piano, Bartók created the 'microcosms' in his six-volume collection with an ear towards expanding the keyboard's possibilities in styles removed from the lavish writing of the previous era. Eder savours the idiosyncrasies that make the six dances so odd and alluring by keeping rhythms crisp and textures transparent.

Here, as in all of the disc's fare, the pianist masters what anyone who wishes to energize Bartók's keyboard repertoire must achieve: she solves all sorts of physical puzzles while bringing clarity to diverse materials. She is compelling in the 14 Bagatelles – brief pieces packed with intriguing moods and ideas – and vivacious in the dazzling complexities of the *Two Romanian Dances*.

Bartók pays homage to the folk traditions of his homeland as only he can in 15 *Hungarian Peasant Songs* and *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs*. Both collections abound in charming, heartfelt and audacious treatment of the sources, and Eder limns the richness with a blend of exuberance and attention to detail that lifts the music from the page, as if she were telling a series of fascinating short stories. **Donald Rosenberg**

GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

Terry Eder

The Manhattan-based pianist explains why Bartók and his music mean so much to her

When did you first discover Bartók?

While a graduate student, I heard a performance of the *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm* and I was hooked. The originality and complexity of the music both mesmerised and puzzled me. During my residency in Budapest, I heard more Bartók than most non-Hungarians hear in a lifetime.

What draws you to him – and Hungary?

There is soulfulness in this music and in the Hungarian character. I find profundity, pathos, humour, melancholy, beauty, playfulness, sarcasm, sorrow – an earthy emotionality. Bartók's music is fundamentally expressive. I am of Eastern European heritage, so perhaps there is also some deeply rooted connection.

Are there special challenges in this music?

You have to out the character underneath the technical difficulties. The rhythmic flow generally and the *rubato* that is necessary for



the *parlando* melodies are heavily influenced by the cadence of the Hungarian language and, not surprisingly, few people speak it! Technical hurdles include unusual, sometimes rapidly changing rhythms and metres; large, awkward and unconventional chords, often with quick changes of hand position; and sudden shifts in character, articulation and dynamics. The physical requirements are difficult for small hands, such as I have.

What further recording plans do you have?

Undoubtedly there is more Bartók in my future. At present, however, I am immersed in some of the great Schubert works, which will most likely be my next recording project.

Brahms

Two String Quartets, Op 51

New Orford Quartet

Bridge © BRIDGE9464 (69' • DDD)



It's almost hard to believe that Brahms had so much trouble composing his two

Op 51 string quartets. Both sound organic and inevitable in the way themes are developed and movements flow from one to the next. The New Orford Quartet approach these chamber monuments with justifiable reverence while providing ample space for them to sing, brood and dance.

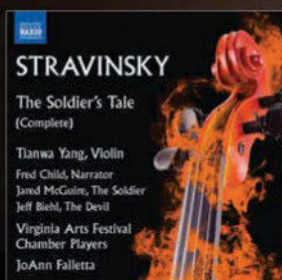
The C minor Quartet, Op 51 No 1, is the more dramatic of the two, remaining in dark places for much of its span. The New Orford capture the restlessness in subtle shifts of phrasing and tempo, shading lines to tender and urgent effect. The rhythmic innovations built into the structures are handled with aplomb as the musicians work their magic and give the impression that bar-lines don't exist. Led with penetrating vibrancy by violinist Jonathan Crow, the performance combines tonal beauty with seamless interaction.

In some ways, the A minor Quartet, Op 51 No 2, is more challenging to bring off, with passions tending to simmer rather than boil. The slow movement is one of those Brahmsian creations that float in the

THE SOLDIER'S TALE

Igor Stravinsky

TIANWA YANG, violin
JOANN FALLETTA, conductor
FRED CHILD, narrator
Jard McGuire, The Soldier
Jeff Biehl, The Devil
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In Tianwa Yang we find an artist of exceptional technique and musicianship.”
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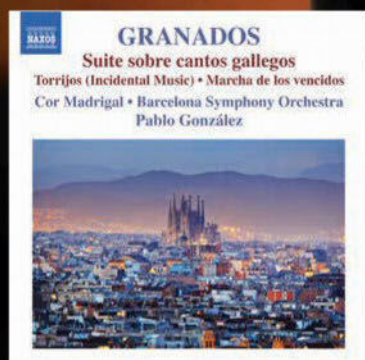
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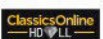
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“
Pablo González, an already fully accomplished maestro, surprises at every performance with his musical maturity, his ability to create chemistry with the orchestras he conducts and the vitality of his craftsmanship.”

– LA RAZÓN

PHOTO: D. VASS

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The New Orford Quartet offer impressive Brahms performances on their new disc

heavens, a few anxious moments aside, prompting extra concentration from its interpreters. The New Orford players are as keenly alert to the contrapuntal conversations as they are to matters of timbral warmth and focus.

The timing of the three Brahms quartets makes them impossible to fit on to one CD but the New Orford clearly need to record the Third, Op 67 in B flat – paired, perhaps, with one of the quintets.

Donald Rosenberg

Pisaro

A mist is a collection of points

Phillip Bush *pf* **Greg Stuart** *perc*

Michael Pisaro *sine tones*

New World © 80772-2 (58' • DDD)



For *A mist is a collection of points*, his first New World release, Cal-Arts

composer Michael Pisaro has charted out an hour's worth of meticulous interplay between pianist Phillip Bush, percussionist Greg Stuart and Pisaro's own sine tones. In *Mist's* three mesmerising, slow-moving 20-minute episodes, Pisaro gives full voice, laid out with a superb sense of

timing, to his roots in John Cage, experimental music, extended durations, indeterminacy and silence. In fact, this CD is ideal for meditation if your goal is to sublimate your breathing to the mostly regular, decidedly deep pulse that arises out of the decaying of sounds; the effect is intensified by the aural haze of sine tone-induced spectral decay created in the process.

During the time that Pisaro's musical landscapes are accumulating, there are enough moments of sine-derived radiance to compensate for long stretches when you're not sure whether you're hearing actual tones or their decay, and whether it matters, which becomes more distracting than it sounds. This dilemma and others have been anticipated by a reasonably friendly user's manual in the guise of a booklet-note essay by composer and writer Jennie Gottschalk. Gottschalk can be as poetic and elliptical as the music itself, as when she describes the effect of throwing rice over the cymbals in Part 3 but, in sum, it's a pretty good road map. Gottschalk suggests you listen on speakers, not headphones; that way, you take advantage of Joe Panzner's mastering of the recording, which she calls crucial to fully experiencing the 'weird fragilities' of the piece. **Laurence Vittes**

'Excelsior'

M Bates *Red River* **Burhans** *Excelsior*

Limbacher *Air* **A Shapiro** *Perpetual Spark*

Fifth House Ensemble

Cedille © CDR90000 148 (64' • DDD • T)



Fifth House Ensemble is a group of young Chicago-based musicians who

have a flair for inventive programming. Their newest disc, 'Excelsior', shows how devoted they are to living composers, with three world-premiere recordings sharing the bill with Mason Bates's *Red River*. All of the pieces contain bursts of colour within narratives revolving around natural phenomena.

The Bates score, from 2007, paints five portraits related to the Colorado River, whose twists and turns mingle with evocations of local people and wonders. The composer creates illuminating and animated episodes, some peppered by snazzy electronic elements. Bates has a gift for balancing exuberance with stillness, and for deftly weaving clarinet, violin, cello and piano with contemporary sounds.

The disc's other extended work is the eponymous *Excelsior*, Caleb Burhans's

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The Red House Ensemble present an array of new works on their latest disc

haunting depiction of a free fall from plane to earth. Somehow, the music hovers in air, the instruments conjuring the aura of a downward journey in minimalist gestures that merge with a soprano singing a surreal text by John Coletti.

Alex Shapiro creates flickers of sound amid lyricism in *Perpetual Spark*, a concise dazzler for sextet. In Jesse Limbacher's exhilarating *Air*, a trio playing oboe, clarinet and bassoon use their breath and assorted instrumental techniques, including key clicks, to explore the many meanings of the work's title.

The members of 5HE, as they call themselves for short, give each piece vivid treatment. Everything is freshly considered and shaped with expressive finesse. In *Excelsior*, soprano Martha Cluver renders the text with ethereal beauty.

Donald Rosenberg

'Flourishes, Tales and Symphonies'

Marlatt Earthscape Meechan Velvet Blue

Saint-Saëns Symphony No 3, 'Organ', Op 78 -

Adagio; Maestoso C Sharpe Flourishes. Prelude,

Elegy and Scherzo Verdi La traviata - Brindisi

Weinberger Schwanda the Bagpiper - Polka and

Fugue W White The Dwarf Planets

Chicago Gargoyle Brass and Organ Ensemble /

Rodney Holmes

MSR Classics © MS1598 (68' • DDD)



tongue like a tending American craft brewery, must be every organ-and-brass ensemble composer's dream. They play their solo riffs like angels, they trump along with a resolute, raucous beat when energy and martial notes are sounded, and they play the lollipops with as much gusto as they do the conservative modern stuff.

Carlyle Sharpe's mighty *Flourishes* opens the CD, full of purpose, conviction and personality, followed by his similarly absorbing, beautifully written 10-minute *Prelude, Elegy and Scherzo*, which verges on memorable while being very satisfying. William White's *The Dwarf Planets* – a cycle of five short pieces inspired by Holst with each movement representing a variety of immortals – is studded with striking sonic moments such as the exquisite trumpet solo in 'Haumea' (Hawaiian goddess of fertility), the splendid horns in 'Ceres' and the large closing noises of 'Makemake' (chief god of the Easter Island Rapa Nui bird-man cult). David Marlatt's inspirational *Earthscape* has an open, Western populist, hymn-like

The Chicago Gargoyle Brass and Organ Ensemble,

feel. Peter Meechan's *Velvet Blue* for rock organ and brass is heavy-duty cool.

Interspersed with their betters, Craig Garner's brilliant arrangements of Verdi, Weinberger and Saint-Saëns perfectly break up an otherwise serious programme. The sound of the ensemble and organist Jared Stellmacher, whether playing on the 2006 Rodgers 1038 at the Saint Michael the Archangel Catholic Church in Wheaton, 30 miles west of Chicago, or the 1982 Casavant Frères, Limitée, Opus 3544, at First United Church in suburban Oak Park, is spatially imposing and grand. **Laurence Vittes**

'Plot'

'Music for Unspecified Instrumentation'

JM Beyer Percussion E Brown December 1952

Brün Plot Erickson Nine and a Half for Henry (and Wilbur and Orville). Pacific Sirens SS Smith

Bones. Winter Tenney Percussion Responses

McCormick Percussion Group

Ravello © (P) RR7916 (118' • DDD)



With a programme based on an ingenious suggestion by Stuart Sanders Smith, the Tampa-based McCormick Percussion Group (they are artists-in-residence at the

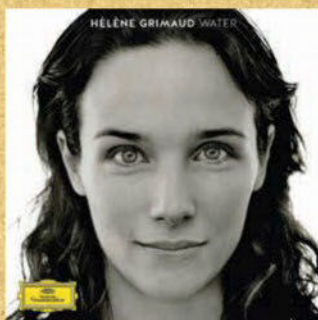
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University of South Florida) create an irresistible force field with percussion music for which the choice of instruments is left up to the players.

Smith's own 20 minutes of liquid musical mobiles called *Bones* sets the tone and mood for what follows, while his 30-minute *Winter* is at once the most conventionally gorgeous and unconventionally scored, for speaker/singer, percussion, bassoon, flute and violin.

Highlights include Robert Erickson's mind-blowing *Pacific Sirens*, which may be the most awesome of an awesome lot, bombarding the ears with sounds ranging from fathoms-deep bass explosions to gradual climaxes whose intensity rivals the opening of *Also sprach Zarathustra*; Earle Brown's exquisite *December 1952*, nine minutes of poetry played from an iconic example of graphic notation; Johanna Magdalena Beyer's naive, early minimalist, refreshingly brash *Percussion* from 1935; and Herbert Brün's title-track, a delicacy-laced but definitely athletic *tour de force* which Chris Herman totally eats up.

The performers are unnervingly in step with each piece's different vibe. There is not one measure in anything they play that doesn't come magically alive, as if it were being heard in the composer's mind for the first exhilarating time. The recordings, made at the Springs Theatre Recording Studio in Tampa, are spectacularly detailed and full of punch. The epigrammatic booklet-notes also pack a lot of power.

Laurence Vittes

'Benita Valente, Vol 2'

Schubert Gretchen am Spinnrade, D118. Lied der Mignon, D877 Nos 2-4. Romanze, D787

Schumann Myrthen, Op 25 - No 7, Die Lotosblume; No 24, Du bist wie eine Blume.

Marienwürmchen, Op 79 No 13 **R Strauss** Drei Lieder der Ophelia, Op 67. Acht Gedichte aus Letzte Blätter, Op 10 - No 1, Zueignung; No 3, Die Nacht; No 8, Allerseelen. Heimkehr, Op 15 No 5. Ständchen, Op 17 No 2. Cäcilie, Op 27 No 2. Einerlei, Op 69 No 3 **Wolf** Er ist's. In dem Schatten meiner Locken. Mausfallensprüchlein. Verborgene Liebe. Die verlassene Mägdlein. Verschwiegene Liebe

Benita Valente sop **Harold Wright** cl

Lydia Artymiwi, **Lee Luvisi**, **Cynthia Raim** pf
Bridge © BRIDGE9451 (62' • DDD • T/T)



The cover of the first volume on Bridge Records devoted to performances by



A supreme artist: soprano Benita Valente is captured in her prime in German song

soprano Benita Valente contains the phrase 'Great Singers of the 20th Century'. For some reason, the second volume does not, though it should. Listen to Valente shape songs by Schubert, Schumann, Strauss and Wolf and you know you're in the presence of a supreme artist. The recordings featured on this volume were made in the 1980s, when Valente was in her prime. She maintained the gleam of her voice by singing repertoire suited to her light lyric soprano, both in concert and on the operatic stage.

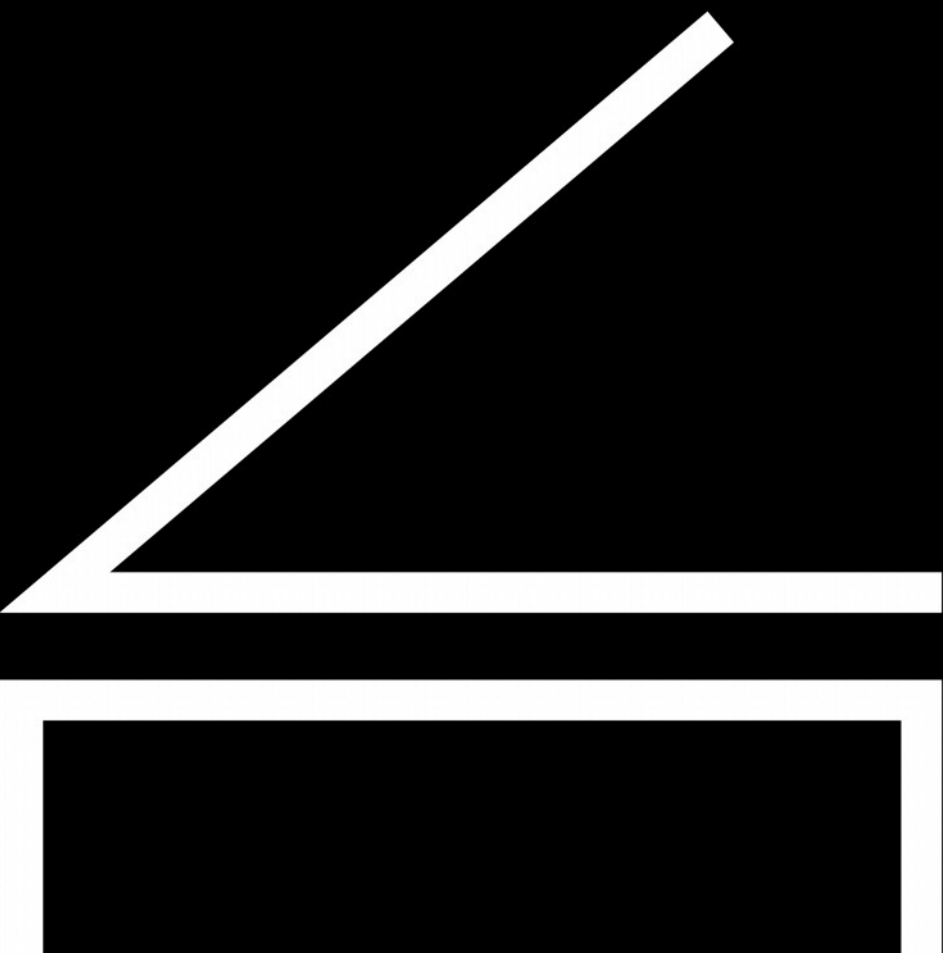
But it isn't just exquisite purity and plaintiveness that make Valente so special. As she inhabits the songs about women on this disc, she summons a spectrum of feelings from the melding of music and texts. Valente switches interpretative

gears with seeming effortlessness. She can be girlish or complicated – or even addled, as in the little waltz in the third of Strauss's *Drei Lieder der Ophelia*. She is an exceptional Schubertian with a gift for evoking the meaning of words (few sing 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' more affectingly).

And Valente somehow brings out the best in the musicians with whom she collaborates. Her colleagues here are distinguished, to say the least: clarinetist Harold Wright and pianists Lydia Artymiwi, Lee Luvisi and Cynthia Raim. They must have cherished the experience of making music with Valente as much as the audiences who heard them – and, thanks to these recordings, continue to do so. **Donald Rosenberg**



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Pierre Boulez – integrity and controversy

Many are the great musicians we mourn monthly in our obituary pages: conductors, artists, as well as label executives and critics who have left their mark on recordings and repertoire. Rightly honoured by the musical world, they might however register only the most vague recognition much beyond it. Increasingly few, these days, seem to be figures whose passing is an event of note by society at large. Claudio Abbado turned out to be one two years ago – and it has very much been the case this month with the death of Pierre Boulez.

His death featured in the news bulletin of BBC Radio 2, not normally known for playing anything approaching the music of Beethoven, let alone Boulez. The *Daily Mail's* lengthy news story even quoted *Gramophone's* interview with Boulez from five years ago. That the avant-garde radical should become mass-market news is something to be pleased about. His avant-garde radicalism is, of course, likely to have been part of how he rose in the public consciousness in the first place. But only a part. Boulez was a figure who believed, passionately, outspokenly and uncompromisingly, in the relevance of art to today's world. In doing so he was controversial, sometimes confrontational and he divided opinion – but the trade-off was that he, and his work, resonated far beyond that of most composers and conductors. And while recalling the more controversial of his comments, it's also important to remember that many would first have had their ears opened to classical music through his teaching (itself unorthodox –



Martin

such as his so-called Rug Concerts in New York), the institutions and ensembles he founded (IRCAM, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Cité de la Musique), or the clarity and advocacy brought by his recordings of 20th-century repertoire. This, music-making, was above all his life's work and his legacy.

There are few classical music figures who do have that wider resonance. A quick mention of some who undoubtedly do – Daniel Barenboim, Sir Simon Rattle – makes it clear that you don't have to be an avant-garde radical or set on shaking the establishment to be among their number. But what unites them all is that they are all uncompromising in their art: it is integrity, as much as personality, that counts – the belief that music, or all art, is part of how people understand and engage with (and challenge) the world around them and within themselves.

Kurt Masur – a successor to Boulez at the New York Philharmonic, and whose obituary we also run this month – was another. No radical avant-gardist he (though he certainly championed new music), it was for unifying diplomacy that he was so respected, something which brought him headlines when, in Leipzig, he played a key role in averting violence in the closing days of the crumbling Soviet empire.

As music-lovers we should be careful of course that we don't give too much weight to profile and fame: it's the music that counts, after all. Though, as Boulez demonstrated, however brilliant a conductor you are, a controversial comment or two clearly doesn't do your reputation any harm either.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'It was through the exquisite *Spiegel* that I first got to know Friedrich Cerha's music', writes **LIAM CAGNEY**,

author of this month's Contemporary Composer feature, 'but *Spiegel* is only one glimmer in Cerha's belt of jewels, and I very much enjoyed perusing Cerha's oeuvre again for this feature.'



'It's been a frustrating 20 years for Haydn collectors, with three period-instrument cycles begun and then

abandoned,' says **RICHARD WIGMORE**, who writes about Decca's completion of its cycle with new versions of Nos 78-81 from Ottavio Dantone. 'The Italian conductor's enthusiasm for these fascinating works is palpable.'



'My appreciation of Pierre Boulez – and I did appreciate his work very much – tries to find the roots of his ideas about conducting within his work as a composer,' says **PHILIP CLARK**, author of our tribute to him. 'And I also reminisce about the time I had an argument with him about Schoenberg.'

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The 12 most highly recommended recordings of the month

FOR THE RECORD

The latest classical music news



Reviews

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Vilde Frang brilliantly pairs Korngold and Britten

ORCHESTRAL

Harnoncourt's fascinating Beethoven; Nielsen's Violin Concerto from Cecilia Zilliacus and his complete symphonies from Paavo Järvi

CHAMBER

The Cecilia Quartet's compelling Mendelssohn; Jos van Immerseel's birthday Schubertiade; Boulez to Zánési: Megadisc's modern music

INSTRUMENTAL

Jonathan Plowright continues his Brahms survey in style; magnificent Medtner from Yevgeny Sudbin; a richly researched Widor project

VOCAL

Archive Anthony Rolfe Johnson from Brussels; La Risonanza's latest Handelian foray; Gardiner's moving Monteverdi from Versailles

REISSUES

Neglected pianist Eugene Istomin given deserved prominence by Sony; a Satie set to begin the composer's anniversary year courtesy of Erato

OPERA

Five modern operas; Callas reissued on Blu-ray; two Weinberg releases; Leclair's only opera

REPLAY

The BBC broadcasts of Nikolai Malko; Toscanini's last hurrah with the New York Phil

BOOKS

Geraint Lewis on a revealing Vaughan Williams biography; Kate Molleson on a thought-provoking reassessment of Nadia Boulanger's life

GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Bryce Morrison sifts through the available recordings of Chopin's *Berceuse*

Features

PIERRE BOULEZ

Philip Clark pays tribute to Pierre Boulez, one of the great pioneers of 20th-century Modernism, and a composer and conductor who leaves behind an outstanding legacy of classic recordings

TASMIN LITTLE

Charlotte Gardner talks to Tasmin Little about how she has risen to the challenge posed by Beethoven's violin sonatas, which she has recorded with pianist Martin Roscoe for Chandos

PERIOD-INSTRUMENT HAYDN

Ottavio Dantone tells Richard Wigmore about making the first recording of Haydn's Symphonies Nos 79 and 81 on period instruments

THE MUSICIAN & THE SCORE

The score of Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio in A minor, explored by Trio Con Brio Copenhagen

ICONS

Tully Potter surveys the life and essential recordings of violinist Leonid Kogan

CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS

The Austrian composer Friedrich Cerha has had a considerable impact on music, says Liam Cagney

CLASSICS RECONSIDERED

Jeremy Nicholas and Rob Cowan discuss the premiere recording of Erich Korngold's Violin Concerto with Jascha Heifetz from 1953

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE

Jeremy Dibble offers a guide to unjustly overlooked music from Victorian Britain

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Music for Lent; Wood and the Wesleys

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MY MUSIC

Rock star Alice Cooper on the appeal of narrating a new recording of *Peter and the Wolf*



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<i>Bolzano</i>	Ferruccio Busoni International Piano Competition	<i>Osaka</i>	Osaka International Chamber Music Competition
<i>Bonn</i>	International Telekom Beethoven Competition	<i>Oslo</i>	The Queen Sonja International Music Competition
<i>Bordeaux</i>	Concours International de Quatuor à Cordes de Bordeaux	<i>Paris*</i>	Concours Long-Thibaud
<i>Bratislava</i>	J.N. Hummel International Piano Competition	<i>Paris</i>	Concours Internationaux de la Ville de Paris
<i>Brescia</i>	International Violin Competition "Città di Brescia"	<i>Parma</i>	"Fondazione Arturo Toscanini"
<i>Bruxelles*</i>	Concours Musical International Reine Elisabeth de Belgique	<i>Pinerolo</i>	International Music Competitions
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<i>Bucharest</i>	Le Grand Prix d'Opera International Singing Competition	<i>Poznan*</i>	Concours International «Città di Porcia»
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<i>Dortmund</i>	International Schubert Competition	<i>Salzburg</i>	BNDES International Piano Competition of Rio de Janeiro
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<i>Düsseldorf</i>	"Aeolus" International Competition for Wind Instruments	<i>Seoul</i>	Paloma O'Shea Santander International Piano Competition
<i>Eindhoven</i>	TROMP International Percussion Competition	<i>Shenzhen</i>	Sendai International Music Competition
<i>Epinal</i>	Concours International de Piano d'Epinal	<i>Sion</i>	Seoul International Music Competition
<i>Fort Worth</i>	Van Cliburn International Piano Competition	<i>Sydney</i>	China Shenzhen International Piano Competition
<i>Geneva*</i>	Concours de Genève	<i>Takamatsu</i>	Concours International de Violon «Tibor Varga» Sion Valais
<i>Genoa*</i>	International Violin Competition "Premio Paganini"	<i>Tbilisi</i>	Sydney International Piano Competition of Australia
<i>Glasgow</i>	Scottish International Piano Competition	<i>Tel Aviv</i>	The Takamatsu International Piano Competition
<i>Graz</i>	International Competition "Franz Schubert and Modern Music"	<i>Terni</i>	Tbilisi International Piano Competition
<i>Hachioji</i>	Gaspar Cassado International Violoncello Competition	<i>Tokyo</i>	The Arthur Rubinstein International Piano
<i>Hamamatsu</i>	Hamamatsu International piano Competition	<i>Tokyo</i>	Master Competition
<i>Hamamatsu</i>	Shizuoka International Opera Competition	<i>Tongyeong</i>	Concours International de Piano «Alessandro Casagrande»
<i>Hannover</i>	Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition	<i>Toulouse</i>	International Conducting Competition
<i>Helsinki</i>	Mirjam Helin International Singing Competition	<i>Trento</i>	International Organ Competition Musashino - Tokyo
<i>Helsinki</i>	Helsinki International Maj Lind Piano Competition	<i>Tromsø</i>	Isang Yun International Music Competition
<i>Helsinki</i>	Jean Sibelius International Violin Competition	<i>Trondheim</i>	Concours International de Chant de la Ville de Toulouse
<i>'s-Hertogenbosch</i>	International Vocal Competition's-Hertogenbosch	<i>Utrecht</i>	International Competition for Orchestra Conductors
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<i>Ludwigslust</i>	Johann Matthias Sperger International Double Bass competition	<i>Yerevan</i>	International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition
<i>Lyon</i>	Concours International de Musique de Chambre - Lyon	<i>Zagreb</i>	Witold Lutoslawski International Cello Competition
<i>Manchester</i>	James Mottram International Piano Competition	<i>Zurich</i>	Weimar International Music Competitions
		<i>Zwickau</i>	China International Piano Competition
			Aram Kachaturian International Competition
			Vaclav Huml International Violin Competition
			Géza Anda International Piano Competition
			International Robert Schumann Contest for Pianists and Singers

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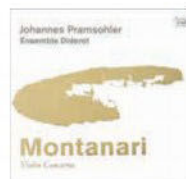
GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Culliford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



BRITTEN. KORNGOLD
Violin Concertos
Vilde Frang *vn*
Frankfurt RSO / James Gaffigan
Warner Classics
► **DAVID GUTMAN'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 24**

A hugely impressive recording, Vilde Frang's brilliant control and dramatic intensity as assured in the lush themes of Korngold's Concerto as in the technical extremes of Britten's.



MONTANARI
Violin Concertos
Ensemble Diderot / Johannes Pramsohler *vn*
Audax

A chance to discover some fascinating but forgotten works from the Baroque, and a very strong case is made for them by this fine Paris-based ensemble.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 32**



NIELSEN
'Works for Violin, Vol 2'
Cecilia Zilliacus *vn*
Helsingborg SO / Daniel Blendulf
dB Productions

A demanding work, containing a variety of styles and approach – not to mention technical challenges – but all beautifully conveyed here by Cecilia Zilliacus.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 32**



MENDELSSOHN
String Quartets, Op 44
Nos 1 and 2
Cecilia Quartet
Analekta

Former Banff Quartet Competition winners, the Cecilia Quartet wonderfully approach these middle Mendelssohn quartets with elegance and affection.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**



BRAHMS
'The Complete Solo Piano Music, Vol 3'
Jonathan Plowright *pf*
BIS

Jonathan Plowright, always a thoughtful and brilliantly skilled pianist, continues his Brahms survey with another superb collection.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



MEDTNER. RACHMANINOV
Piano Works
Yevgeny Sudbin *pf*
BIS

Yevgeny Sudbin's understanding of Medtner's sound world feels instinctive and his performance is a highly personal one.

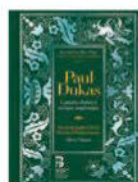
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**



VILSMAÏR. BIBER. PISENDEL
Solo Violin Works
Vaughan Jones *vn*
First Hand

More superb Baroque discoveries this month; the highlight is the engaging and wonderfully played set of Six Partitas by Vilsmayr.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**



DUKAS
'Cantates, choeurs et musique symphonique'
Sols; Flemish Radio Choir; Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra / Hervé Niquet

Ediciones Singulares

They may not have won Dukas the competition he wrote them for, but don't let that put you off: a rewarding listen.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**



HANDEL
'Duetti e terzetti italiani'
Sols; La Risonanza / Fabio Bonizzoni
Glossa

The impeccable standard of singing and playing we've come to expect from Bonizzoni and colleagues, here in a survey of rarely recorded early Handel.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



LECLAIR
Scylla et Glaucus
Sols; Les Nouveaux Caractères / Sébastien d'Hérin *hpd*
Alpha

Drama, emotion and some quite delightful music courtesy of Leclair in his only opera, here given superb and spirited advocacy.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**



DVD/BLU-RAY
WIDOR 'Master of the Organ Symphony'
Gerard Brooks, Daniel Roth, Carolyn Shuster Fournier *orgs*
Fugue State Films

Another expertly in-depth (but completely accessible) addition to Fugue State Films' fascinating explorations of key figures from the organ world.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
EUGENE ISTOMIN
'The Concerto and Solo Recordings'
Sony Classical

A chance to reappraise the legacy of pianist Eugene Istomin in this excellent-value set from Sony.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



Listen to many of the Editor's Choice recordings online at **qobuz.com**

FOR THE RECORD

Classical musicians recognised in the 2016 New Year's Honours List

A number of classical musicians have been recognised in the 2016 New Year's Honours List, including Radu Lupu, Stuart Bedford, Malcolm Martineau and Alina Ibragimova.

The pianist Radu Lupu received a CBE for 'services to music'. Lupu rose to prominence by winning the Enescu International, Van Cliburn, and Leeds piano competitions between 1966 and 1969. His recording of Schubert's piano duets with Murray Perahia won a *Gramophone* Award in 1986.

Lupu is keen to avoid the limelight, but numerous musicians and friends paid tribute to the pianist on *Gramophone's* website to mark his 70th birthday in November. The tributes were gathered by cellist Steven Isserlis, who himself wrote: 'Radu Lupu is one of the greatest artists I have ever heard or known. His music comes from deep within, his performances the result of profound thinking and fervent emotion. As a man, he is much beloved: kind, witty, generous and without any hint of arrogance whatsoever – to put it mildly.'

The pianist Malcolm Martineau received an OBE for 'services to music and young singers'. Martineau is

a prolific recording artist who has won *Gramophone* Awards for his recordings of Schubert Lieder with Bryn Terfel (10/94) and a recital called 'Songs of War' with Simon Keenlyside (2/12). Martineau recently curated and performed on a five-volume recorded survey of Poulenc's complete songs for Signum Classics, working with a number of singers including Christopher Maltman, Dame Felicity Lott and Jonathan Lemalu.

The violinist Alina Ibragimova, who made such an impression with her solo Bach appearances at the 2015 BBC Proms, received an MBE. Ibragimova has made a string of outstanding recordings in recent years, not least her account of Ysaÿe's

Six Sonatas for Solo Violin (for Hyperion), which was *Gramophone's* Recording of the Month in July 2015. Her three-volume survey of Beethoven's violin sonatas with pianist Cédric Tiberghien, recorded live at London's Wigmore Hall, is also highly recommended.

Also among those honoured were the conductor Stuart Bedford (OBE) and David Joseph, Chair and CEO, Universal Music UK and Ireland, who received a CBE.



(From top) Radu Lupu, Malcolm Martineau and Alina Ibragimova all feature in the New Year's Honours List

BBC Proms Inspire offers fresh opportunities to young composers

The BBC Proms Inspire scheme has been active for 18 years, offering young composers an opportunity to hear their work performed at the BBC Proms. This year, though, the scheme is expanding to include composer workshops, exclusive ticket offers and networking events. The core of Inspire remains the competition for young composers aged 12-18, which not only rewards the winner with that special Proms performance but also a further BBC commission. Previous competition winners include Tansy Davies, Alissa Firsova, Mark Simpson and Duncan Ward. The closing date for entries is May 26 and full details are available at bbc.co.uk

Richard Burnett collection of instruments to be auctioned

Richard Burnett's exceptional collection of more than 70 early keyboard instruments will be offered for sale by Dreweatts & Bloomsbury Auctions on May 11. The sale will raise funds for the Finchcocks Charity, which preserves original and rare instruments for future generations. The Burnett collection includes a chamber organ by John Byfield (1766), a single-manual harpsichord by JJ Antunes (1785), a virginal by Onofrio Guarracino (1668), and a grand piano by Conrad Graf (c1820). The catalogue will be available to view online from early March.

Conductor Kazushi Ono awarded the Asahi Prize

The Asahi Prize was established in 1929 to 'honour individuals and groups that have made outstanding accomplishments in the fields of academia and arts, and have greatly contributed to the development and progress of Japanese culture and society at large'. This year, the conductor Kazushi Ono has been awarded the prize alongside, among others, the haiku poet Tota Kaneko.

Ono is a former Principal Conductor of the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra and is the current Principal Conductor of Lyon Opera. Ono's DVD recording of Ravel's *L'heure espagnole* and *L'enfant et les sortilèges* from Glyndebourne won the *Gramophone* Opera Award in 2014.



Kazushi Ono: one of the winners of the Asahi Prize

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra appoints new Concertmaster

The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and Vienna State Opera Orchestra have named the 30-year-old Brazilian-German violinist José Maria Blumenschein as a new Concertmaster, replacing Rainer Küchl who was appointed to the position at the age of 20 in 1971.

Blumenschein is currently Concertmaster of the WDR Symphony Orchestra and is a founding member of the Vertigo String Quartet. He will assume his new role in September.

UK music consumption rises four per cent in 2015

The British Phonographic Industry (BPI) has published its 2015 Music Market Report, revealing that audio streaming increased from 2014 by 82 per cent, with digital formats now accounting for 54 per cent of all UK music consumption. Demand for CD only declined by 3.9 per cent (a much slower decline for the format than many anticipated) and 2.1 million vinyl albums were sold (the highest number in 21 years).

Geoff Taylor, CEO of the BPI said: 'The soaring popularity of music streaming and the burgeoning vinyl revival mean that UK music consumption rose again in 2015. Services such as Spotify and Apple Music are going mainstream as more people discover how wonderful it is to have all the music in the world to listen to, whenever and wherever they want. Millions of fans also continue to build treasured collections of favourite albums on vinyl, CD or downloads.'

Nosedà named Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra

The Italian conductor Gianandrea Nosedà, 51, has been named the new Music Director of Washington DC's National Symphony Orchestra. Succeeding Christoph Eschenbach, Nosedà will assume the role in 2017. Currently Music Director of the Teatro Regio in Turin, Nosedà served as the Music Director of the Manchester-based BBC Philharmonic (2002-11) with which he recorded – and continues to record – extensively for Chandos. Earlier in his career he was the first foreign-born Principal Guest Conductor of the Mariinsky Orchestra of St Petersburg, which perhaps explains his remarkable affinity with the Russian repertoire.

Nosedà first conducted the NSO in 2011 and clearly the chemistry worked. 'What really impressed me,' he told the *Washington Post*, 'is the development we got together, from the first rehearsal to the first concert, and how much the quality was increasing in the next two performances.'

In addition to his recordings for Chandos, which include a series focusing on 20th-century Italian symphonic repertoire, Nosedà is a much sought-after recital partner, having conducted solo recordings for Rolando Villazón, Diana Damrau and Anna Netrebko. In 2014, Nosedà won a *Gramophone* Award for his account of the Prokofiev piano concertos with pianist Jean-Efflam Bavouzet and the BBC Philharmonic, an album that was also named Recording of the Month in March 2014, with Rob Cowan writing: 'This superb cycle of the concertos promotes a combination of lyricism and chutzpah that lies at the very heart of these endlessly fascinating works.'



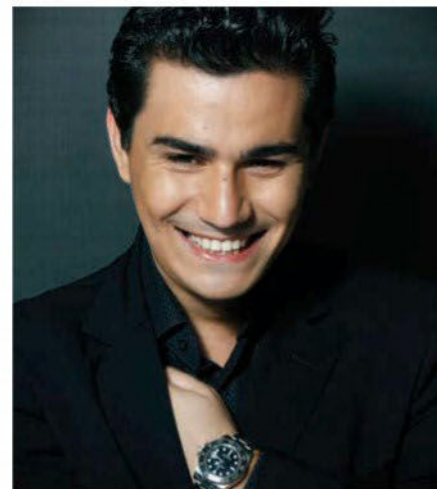
Gianandrea Nosedà is heading to Washington DC

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PODCASTS

Gramophone's Editor-in-Chief James Jolly talks to the Albanian lyric tenor Saimir Pirgu (pictured) about his new album of opera arias, 'Il mio canto', which he has recorded for Opus Arte with the Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and conductor Speranza Scappucci.



REVIEWS DATABASE

Offering more than 30,000 *Gramophone* reviews from 1983 to the present, our dedicated and fully searchable Reviews Database makes reading three decades' worth of *Gramophone's* expert critics' views easier than ever before.

GRAMOPHONE'S TOP 10s

If you're after a recording recommendation for a particular work, then a *Gramophone* Top 10 list is the perfect place to visit. We have Top 10s dedicated to everything from the works of Rachmaninov, Beethoven and Mozart to genres such as symphonies, string quartets and British choral works. Each recommended recording is linked to its original *Gramophone* review, and we are frequently adding new Top 10 lists, so do keep your eyes peeled.

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REMEMBERING BOULEZ:

musical modernist, paradoxical pioneer

During the weeks leading up to his death on January 5, 2016, Pierre Boulez had been preying on my mind. Not, you understand, because of any eerie premonition that his stay on this earth was about to be terminated, but because I'd discovered a photograph

online of Boulez in the company of Leonard Bernstein [see right] that, the more I studied it, drew me in deeper and deeper. Given their jowly middle age – not to mention the sports-casual vibe of Bernstein's jacket – it would be safe to assume that the photograph was taken around the time of the great Bernstein/Boulez succession, when Boulez replaced Bernstein as the Principal Conductor of the New York Philharmonic.

Bernstein, standing in the background, is placing what looks curiously like a protective hand on Boulez's shoulder, who is turning his head, rather coquettishly it has to be said, in Lenny's general direction. I began to imagine the conversations they might have shared, these two great conductor-composers with their radically divergent views on music, musings that then migrated towards Twitter in shorthand as, aping the style of *Private Eye* front-cover speech bubbles, I aimed to provoke certain hilarity by implying that this air of conductorly bonhomie might not be altogether sincere. Bernstein to Boulez: 'You conduct my *Mass* and I'll kill you.' Boulez back at Bernstein: 'What makes you think I'd *want* to conduct it?' And looking at the photograph carefully, those smiles really do begin to look forced; like at any moment their lips might be about to crack under the strain of being divided by the common language of music.

Following the announcement of Boulez's death, one newspaper critic told BBC Radio 3 that he felt 'bereft', and the general consensus opined, as it tends to at times like this, that Boulez's passing marked the end of an era, to which I'd add the rider that it marks the end of a whole way of perceiving music, too. After Bruno Maderna, Luigi Nono, Luciano Berio, Karlheinz Stockhausen, György Ligeti and Mauricio Kagel, Boulez was the last major player in what is colloquially termed 'the post-war avant-garde', a convenient catch-all phrase for that burst of 1950s compositional activity normally considered to have been centred around the summer schools for new music in Darmstadt – where composers, the less-informed history books tell us, grappled as one with increasingly refined, purist re-purposings of Arnold Schoenberg's 12-tone techniques –

He embraced the avant-garde cause, then appeared to dilute those principles in his own music. He issued polemics against composers, then recorded their work. In person, he was at times waspish, at others charming. And yet, writes Philip Clark, Pierre Boulez almost singlehandedly changed the way we listen

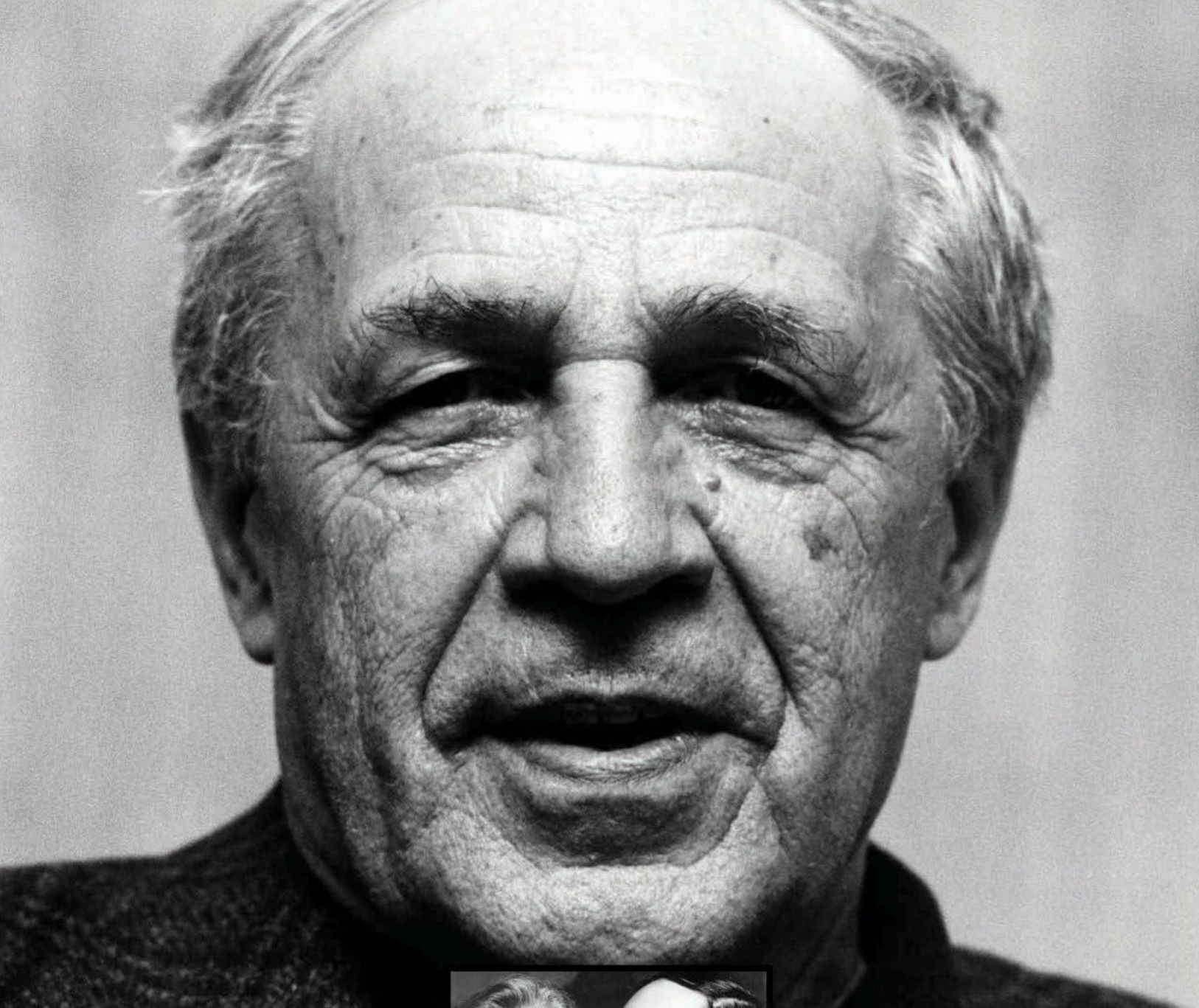
but which, in reality, had major centres all over Europe (Paris, Rome and Cologne in particular), where composer egos clashed as palpable stylistic differences, and ways of moving on from Second Viennese School orthodoxies, were aired.

The last time I saw Boulez conduct – in 2011 when he

performed his *Pli selon pli* with soprano Barbara Hannigan and the Ensemble Intercontemporain at the Royal Festival Hall in London – he looked alarmingly frail suddenly, as if the gravity of advancing age could no longer be defied. Reports of the subsequent deterioration in his health then circulated for a few years, and so the sad news was not a bolt from the blue. And yet that news, when it came, affected me more than I had been anticipating – a key point of orientation had been removed from the landscape. When I was piecing together my own world of music in my early teens, the Jewish, jazz-adoring, Romantic Bernstein represented one marker; but discovering the calm rationality of Boulez taught me to take the temperature of music in other ways, and many readers, I suspect, will have variations of their own on that story. I never did get to interview Bernstein, but one day in the spring of 2010 I showed up at the appointed hour at the Cité de la Musique in Paris for my one and only interview with Boulez, published as an 85th birthday tribute in *Gramophone's* October 2010 issue (with its Rachmaninov cover feature – goodness knows how that juxtaposition played back at Boulez HQ).

THE MAN VS THE MYTHOMANIA

His milestone birthday just around the corner, Boulez had, when we met, just wrapped up a three-hour rehearsal of Birtwistle's *...agm...* and I approached his podium rather apprehensively. Would he now be too tired to engage properly? That is assuming he hadn't forgotten I was coming. But a quick glance towards this approaching stranger and he uttered the reassuring words, 'Philip Clark? *Gramophone*?' Yes, he had remembered and any concerns about any post-rehearsal torpor were soon allayed as our allotted 60 minutes stretched towards 90. The tributes I've read from musicians with whom he worked and associated have sought, and I suspect consciously, to disassociate Boulez the man from all the surrounding mythomania. His forbidding high intelligence and that famously waspish tongue need to be viewed, the argument is pressed, in the context of his considerable personal warmth



and rapier wit. And I can't claim anything other than that, in Paris on that afternoon in 2010, Boulez was unfailingly charming. He asked after friends back in the UK, the composer Jonathan Harvey in particular, and his old-school courtesy extended to making sure I knew which Métro train would land me back at my temporary digs in Montmartre.

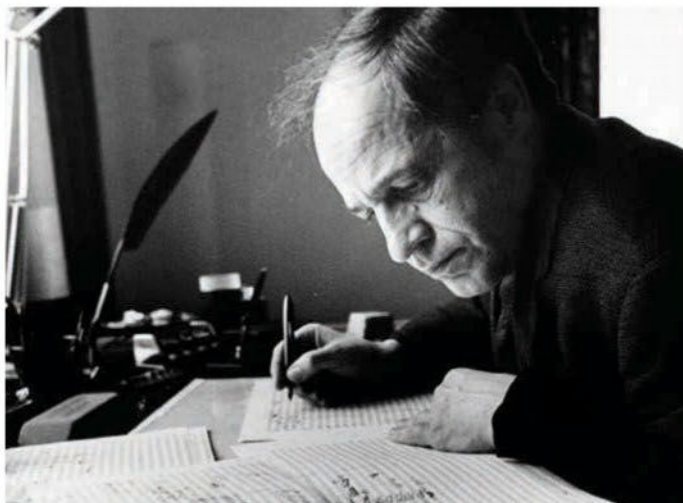
The interview, if you need to be acquainted with it, has since been posted on *Gramophone's* website, and still, I think, stands up well. It is, of course, what it is: a momentary snapshot, a dialogue between a music journalist trying to extract as much information as possible in a short space of time from a man expert at conducting himself in interviews, deflecting questions over which he didn't want to dwell in order to, even at this late stage in his career, evangelise about his core message. Reading the interview back now, I realise it conforms to the classic arc of many Boulez interviews, a characteristic



With Leonard Bernstein (left) in New York in 1969

laying waste to the evils of neo-classicism coming as standard. I wish now that I'd probed his oddball decision to record Varèse's *Déserts* (twice!) without the electronics: imagine recording Ravel's *Boléro* minus the snare drum – it's that inexplicable. And what did Boulez *really* think of 'The Perfect Stranger', the 1984 album he recorded with rock guitarist, composer and professional agent provocateur Frank Zappa – easily the most boring in the Zappa discography, and quite possibly in Boulez's too.

Instead, my opening gambit centred on the three CDs that Deutsche Grammophon was about to release under the tag 'Boulez At 85' – Ravel's piano concertos, Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (paired with the *Adagio* from Symphony No 10) and his first recording of music by Karol Szymanowski. Wasn't this repertoire that might easily have been recorded by any other conductor on the DG roster, music that hardly flexed



Committed: Boulez composing in 1971; With Messiaen in 1977: Boulez was drawn to Messiaen's work and, like his fellow countryman, wrote analytical essays on his own music

those fearless Modernist muscles that made his name? But Boulez's answer was disarmingly pragmatic: 'I have done my best to find acceptance for the masterpieces of Stravinsky and Schoenberg – especially Schoenberg, Webern too – but there are other worlds to be explored, even if they are less attractive or important,' he told me.

From there the interview raced forwards. Boulez's characteristically dialectical take on Ravel's G major Piano Concerto – 'What you hear is jazz of 1925, so that is immediately dated... The language he borrows destroys his own language' – sounded a prescient warning to any composer minded to scoop the surface off jazz, and all went well until we dug ourselves into a momentary crisis. I had *thought* I'd asked Boulez a perfectly reasonable question about the nature of Schoenberg's harmonic thinking; that his restless, wandering harmonies might in some way be related to his Jewish identity. But Boulez read my question as meaning that I heard traces of Jewish folk music sloshing around the core of *Pierrot lunaire* or *Die glückliche Hand* and we banged heads at cross-purposes for a good few minutes, me pressing the point that I meant harmonic context *not* idiom as Boulez brought Mahler and Wagner into the argument, until I felt myself stepping outside the situation like characters from Woody Allen's *The Purple*

'I have done my best to find acceptance for the masterpieces of Stravinsky and Schoenberg – especially Schoenberg, Webern too – but there are other worlds to be explored, even if they are less attractive or important' – Boulez

Rose of Cairo. 'Great you're having an argument about Schoenberg and harmony,' I said to myself. 'Trouble is, you're arguing the toss with Pierre Boulez. Best stop this madness – and now – or else he's going to annihilate you.'

NEW WAYS OF LISTENING

Out of that crisis, though, emerged a trinket of sublime clarity, as an apparently offhand comment summed up the essence of Boulez. 'Schoenberg's *Erwartung* uses ostinatos, which gives it stability,' he explained. 'In the third of the *Five Orchestral Pieces* there is simply a chord of five notes – it goes down, goes up and back to its first position. That's all. Easy. But problems of perception occur when complex harmonic movement is not controlled vertically. That's when you need to listen differently.'

Needing to listen differently – it's a Boulez thing. And the extent to which Boulez insisted on new modes of listening, through his own compositions and the dispassionate clarity with which he led audiences deep inside the atonal eddy as conductor, not to mention his affirmation of the importance of electronics to the modern music experience and his many television lectures and writings, represented a complete and utter game-changer. Conductors before Boulez – Hermann Scherchen, Ernest Bour, Hans Rosbaud for instance – had placed the commissioning and performance of

BOULEZ: A TIMELINE

1925 (March 26) Born in Montbrison, near Lyon

1941 Upon leaving school, studies higher mathematics in Lyon

1942 Attends Paris Conservatoire, studying with Olivier Messiaen

1944-46 Studies counterpoint with Honegger's wife, Andrée Vaurabourg: 'He was never late'

1945 Writes *Notations* for piano (orchestrated from 1978 onwards)

1946 Music Director of Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud's

Paris theatre company (until 1955).

Composes Piano Sonata No 1

1948 Piano Sonata No 2

1951-52 *Le visage nuptial* (after the chamber work of 1946-47)

1953-55 *Le marteau sans maître*

1954 Founds concert society Le Domaine Musical

1954-56 Teaches at Darmstadt (and again intermittently 1960-65)

1957 Makes US debut in LA

1957-62 Composes *Pli selon pli* (revised in 1984 and 1989)

1960-63 Professor of composition at Basle Musik-Akademie

1961-68 *Domaines*

1963 Conducts 50th anniversary performance of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in Paris. Also in Paris, conducts first French performance of Berg's *Wozzeck*

1965 *Eclat*, for 15 instruments.

Conducts US orchestra for first time (Cleveland)

1968 *Livre pour cordes*

1970 *cummings ist der dichter*

1970-72 Appointed music advisor of the Cleveland Orchestra

1971-75 Chief Conductor, BBC SO

1971-77 Music Director, New York Philharmonic Orchestra

1972 ... *explosante fixe*...

1974-5 *Rituel: In memoriam Bruno Maderna*

1976 Conducts centenary *Ring* production (directed by Patrice Chéreau) at Bayreuth. In the same year, founds Ensemble Intercontemporain

modern composition at the core of their lives as musicians, but Boulez would push much further.

Time now to wake up, *mes amis!* What he perceived as the sleepy, self-regarding culture that, in the 1950s, was cushioning classical music needed to be more proactive than pay mere lip service to Boulez's ideas – his ideas were not only to be listened to, they needed to be acted upon. French composers of the neo-classical ilk of Francis Poulenc and Darius Milhaud were lampooned as 'the divertimento generation'. Sibelius was an utterly hopeless cause (although the phrase 'the world's worst composer', sometimes attributed to Boulez, were actually the words of Boulez's teacher René Leibowitz). Opera houses were monuments to outmoded concepts which ought to be blown up, words that in the febrile post-9/11 atmosphere caught up with him when some Swiss boys in blue 'wanted a word'. Boulez's polemics were designed to put him on the right side of history – and the passing of time in Boulez-speak was interchangeable with the forward march of progress. Composing serial music was not a stylistic lifestyle choice; as a composer it was one's historical obligation. Conducting serial music demanded a radical overhaul of conductorly gesture, leading Boulez to cultivate a unified musical identity: thinker, composer and conductor operating together. Anyone minded to raise objections to this project had condemned themselves to irrelevance; and Boulez was duly accused of being an intolerant moral bully and a power-obsessed ideologue.

CONDUCTOR VS COMPOSER

An underlying narrative that shaped many tributes and obituaries I read in the days following his death suggested that Boulez stepped up his activities as a conductor in the early



'To watch Boulez conduct is to observe someone whose physical presence is dedicated to realising sounds that have never before been brought forth. His arm shoots out and a cascade of dizzyingly varied percussion results, as if a musical Jackson Pollock is throwing paint across the auditorium' – Ben Watson, *The Wire*

1970s only when the energy that had sparked Boulez the composer had begun to peter out (John Adams asserted as much when I interviewed him for *Gramophone's* June 2008 issue). The implication was that Boulez would now betray his principles by jet-setting around the world conducting not Stockhausen's *Kontra-Punkte* or Berio's *Serenata I* but Mahler blockbusters, early-period Stravinsky (you were more likely to hear *The Firebird* at a Boulez gig than the 12-tone *Aldous Huxley Variations*) and Debussy lollipops – rears-on-seats guarantors all of them. But personally I struggle to separate the instincts of Boulez as composer and conductor.

'To watch Boulez conduct Edgard Varèse or Olivier Messiaen or, best of all, one of his own masterpieces, such as *Le marteau sans maître*, *Pli selon pli*, *Eclat-Multiples* or *Répons*,' Ben Watson wrote in

a 1991 issue of *The Wire*, 'is to observe someone whose physical presence is dedicated to realising sounds that have never before been brought forth. His arm shoots out and a cascade of dizzyingly varied percussion results, as if a musical Jackson Pollock is throwing paint across the auditorium.' Watson's words are worth reviving 25 years on because they explicitly link the unheralded *sound* of Boulez's music – and by extension other music he conducted – with his physical gesturing on the podium, a connection made all too rarely. Piet Mondrian's division of the plane into irregularly displaced grids might actually be a more fitting analogy for Boulez's conducting style than the painterly choreography of Pollock's drips; but either way I can hear my imaginary Pierre ask my fantasy Bernstein on Twitter: 'Why do the shapes of your beats need to emote so much, Lenny? Why not just *conduct* the music and let the emotion take care of itself?'

Just as Messiaen would lay out the basics of his compositional technique in his 1944 treatise *Technique de mon langage musical* – part of a tradition in French music of composers explaining themselves that produced Rameau's *Treatise on Harmony*, Berlioz's *Grand traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes* and Pierre Schaeffer's *À la recherche d'une musique concrète* – Boulez published analytical essays on his early works such as *Polyphonie X* and *Structures* under the highly apt title *Frenzy and Organisation*.

Detractors find it telling (and roll-on-the-floor amusing) that Boulez would choose to withdraw the music of *Polyphonie X*, one of his early hardcore experiments in total serial technique (where each musical parameter became systemised), while the explanatory essay still stands, but such essays, stacked with charts and diagrammatic representations of how the music might function as sound, helped write the Boulez mythology. And as part of a collection called

1976-77 *Messagesquise*
1977 Named Director of the newly opened IRCAM in Paris
1979 Conducts Berg's *Lulu* in Friedrich Cerha's completion
1980-84 *Répons*
1985 *Mémoriale*
1988 *Dérive II*
1992 Conducts Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (directed by Peter Stein) for Welsh National Opera
1995 Named Artist of the Year by *Gramophone*

1995-98 *sur Incises*
1995 onwards Records Mahler's symphonies with various orchestras
1996 Conducts and records Bruckner's Symphony No 8 at the invitation of the Vienna PO
2010 Performs and records Szymanowski's music for the first time (VPO/DG)
2012 Voted into *Gramophone's* Hall of Fame
2016 (January 5) Dies in Paris at 90



Conducting at the Académie de musique, Paris, in 1999 – Boulez never used a baton

‘Music is a labyrinth with no beginning and no end, full of new paths to discover, where mystery remains eternal’ – Boulez

The Shaping Imagination, he published a short 1960 essay entitled *Demythologising the Conductor* that hints at a comparable rationalisation of conductorly technique. ‘No less urgent a task is the *demythification* of the personality of the conductor,’ Boulez writes, ‘who plays the *chef* (is it *d’école* or *de cuisine*?) all too often to the detriment...of the reputation of works that, by a little shuffling, have become identified with his own personal reputation,’ an inflammatory statement indeed at a time when classical music remained fixated on the personalities of great maestros and music they chose to call their own. But conventional conducting technique, essentially designed to carry the dramatic arc of Classical and Romantic music, might not play to the strengths of ‘present-day works [which] increasingly present problems which are as much acoustical as dramatic’.

CULTURE CLASH

In 1965, Michael Tippett came face to face with one of those new-fangled acoustical problems when he was attending a concert at that year’s Edinburgh Festival and encountered a performance of Boulez’s Second Piano Sonata (although some sources suggest *Pli selon pli*). The instinctive emotional response of the Beethoven-worshipping Tippett, a composer devoted to harmonic goals, was to find Boulez’s music static and motionless; for all the extravagance of the notes, the music never particularly journeyed anywhere; nothing much actually ‘happened’. This realisation led Tippett towards the jagged contrasts of material that would define his Third Symphony; but although Boulez would certainly have objected to the judgement passed, I’m not sure he would have necessarily chosen to contradict the specifics of Tippett’s fascinating little analysis. A culture clash was revealed: the poetry of Boulez’s music was more Proust than expressionist Kafka, operating by subtle insinuation, ideas ruminated upon and viewed from each and every angle; this was open-ended paragraphing rather than the Germanic cadences beloved of Tippett.

‘Music is a labyrinth with no beginning and no end, full of new paths to discover, where mystery remains eternal,’ Boulez said.

Don’t forget that when he was appointed Music Director of the New York Philharmonic in 1971, the same year he became Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra – while also acting as music advisor to the Cleveland Orchestra – Boulez had ridden the 1960s on a sharp learning curve. Precious documents of his work as a conductor during the 1950s and early ’60s – the Le Domaine Musical concerts in particular – are focused around Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Stravinsky, Messiaen, Varèse and work by his serially minded peers, music that related, albeit tangentially in some cases, to his own compositional credo. And suddenly, in 1964 on the occasion of his first concert with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, he found himself contractually obliged to accompany Vladimir Ashkenazy in a piano concerto by Chopin (hat-tip to Nicholas Kenyon’s *Observer* appreciation for that nugget). True enough, Boulez knuckled down and enabled to continue the sort of everyday orchestral life that once he was minded to lash out against; but his tenure at the BBC changed musical values in this country indelibly. Politically, the country was about to discuss whether or not to embrace Europe in a referendum; musically Boulez, and Radio 3 controller William Glock, had already made that decision.

Which brings us into the marrow of the Boulez controversy. His death marks the end of a whole way of perceiving music, because applying pure aesthetic judgements to music is now not the done thing. Composers who grew up in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War were minded to care about the future – composition had a more elevated moral imperative than merely placing notes on manuscript paper – and Boulez personified what might be dismissed today as an overly protectionist, idealised view of music. Pandering to fickle popular taste, pretending that difficult music could be made easy – therein lay, in Boulez’s mind, the road to ruin.

There were, of course, casualties. Fans of Henri Dutilleux can never quite bring themselves to forgive Boulez for his haughty dismissal of his early works – although if Boulez’s intention was indeed to torpedo Dutilleux’s career then he failed miserably. And composers who stuck doggedly to the Modernist cause began to raise objections that latter-day Boulez, like the florid, almost embarrassingly pretty *Dérive I*, suggested an unacceptable dilution of the first principles – then again, what else could you expect from a man who gladly threw in his lot with bourgeois orchestral institutions and who, as witness his discography with the NYPO, began issuing records of Handel, Scriabin and Roussel alongside Webern and Elliott Carter?

Yes indeed...What sort of ideologue behaves like that, going around issuing polemics against Stravinsky and Schoenberg and then recording their work with finespun care? You don’t have to search for long to find composers – two prime examples being Ligeti and Birtwistle – who spoke against serialism but whose music intrigued Boulez enough for him to perform it and evangelise about its qualities. Whether founding IRCAM (his state-of-the-art electronic music research institute in Paris), or introducing modern composition via his Rug Concerts in New York, or giving performances (which have since achieved legendary status) at London’s Roundhouse, Boulez viewed himself as a custodian of progressive music, and that came to include Mahler, Bruckner and Szymanowski. With the core work done, with Webern, Schoenberg, Berg, Bartók and Stravinsky in the can, there were always other worlds to be explored. **G**
Two Boulez boxes – DG’s *The Complete Works* and Sony’s *The Complete Columbia Album Collection* are both currently available. See gramophone.co.uk for retrospective Boulez articles/reviews

Julian Anderson, composer and committed advocate of Boulez's music, reflects on the debt we owe him




Exploring Boulez: Julian Anderson introduces excerpts of Boulez's music, played by the Royal Academy's Manson Ensemble, at the Aldeburgh Festival in June 2015

You'd have to go back to Wagner to find a musical figure who has marked both their own profession and culture at large so lastingly and in such diverse ways as Pierre Boulez. His achievements as composer alone are remarkable. Works of such beauty and liveliness as *Le marteau sans maître*, *Pli selon pli*, ...*explosante-fixe...*, *Notations*, *Eclat-Multiples* or *Le visage nuptial* are amongst the marvels of the past 100 years of music and will surely last – they already have done.

Boulez changed both orchestral playing and concert repertoire. To take two small examples, before Boulez put them on the map, Berg's *Three Orchestral Pieces* and Varèse's *Amérique* – two incontestable 20th-century classics – were largely unplayed (Boulez's performances of the latter were the first since 1929). His conducting, learnt on the job, combined an impeccable ear with an almost sculptural use of hands in place of a baton. Rehearsals were exacting, and his best concerts an unforgettably fresh experience. For a multitude of other achievements, such as being the driving force behind the opening of the Cité de la Musique and, more recently, the Philharmonie de Paris – many of them of surprisingly little direct benefit to himself and often done at the expense of his own creative work – our present world owes a great debt to Pierre Boulez.

Personally reserved, enormously brave and utterly devoted to putting fine music at the centre of society, his intense gifts and organisational know-how have been shared by few others; and none have been so consistently successful in realising their dreams of a more cultivated world.

Such strong convictions generate controversy. Boulez was faithful to music he loved and had little time for the rest. His concerts were consistently well-programmed, but some striking composers of the past 60 years (such as Dutilleux) found themselves ignored whilst he conducted other, and occasionally minor, figures who wrote more to his taste. Those excluded were understandably hurt, and on occasion said so. But it is often forgotten that Boulez was an early supporter of Steve Reich, programming his *Phase Patterns* in a 1971 'Prospective Encounter' concert he ran whilst at the New York Philharmonic, and programming his music later at IRCAM. Boulez was more open-minded than most of his critics.

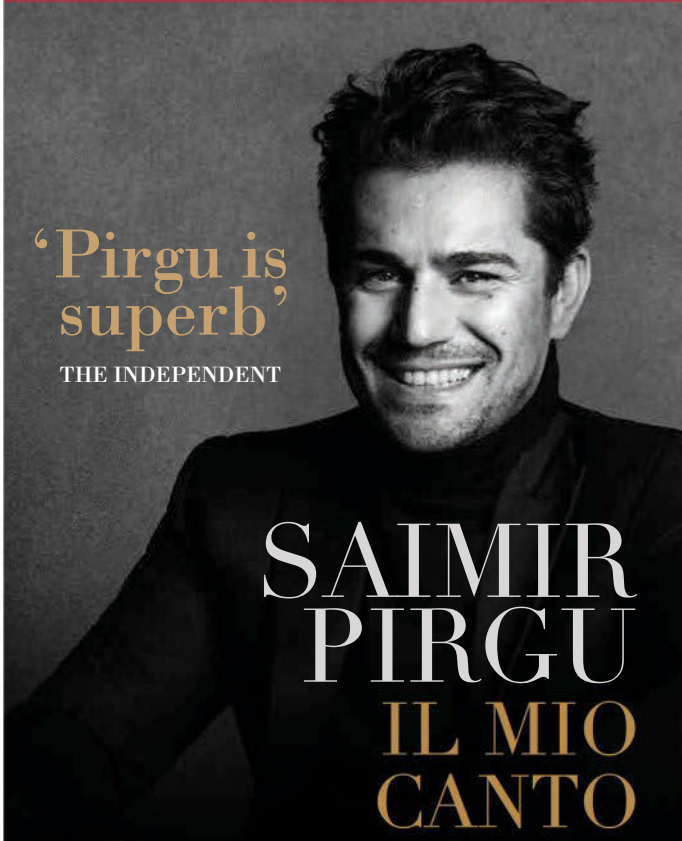
So I will not imitate Boulez at Schoenberg's death and shout 'Boulez is dead!' Boulez will live on in the hearts, minds, and above all the ears of all who care about music. 

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'I wanted to say I've been there, I've climbed that mountain'

She may be better known for mastering Romantic repertoire and forgotten British gems, but Tasmin Little isn't afraid to step outside her comfort zone, as her new recording of the complete Beethoven violin sonatas proves, writes Charlotte Gardner

The Beethovens are probably the most important works for piano and violin in the repertoire,' says Tasmin Little. 'They're works that I always wanted to record, just for myself, so that I could say that I've been there, I've climbed that mountain. And now was a good time to do it. I've always enjoyed playing unusual repertoire, but I don't want to only ever be thought of in terms of that because I would feel that I was only half a player.'

I'm sitting with Little in the kitchen of her west-London home, sheet music strewn across the table in front of us, as she tells me about her new Chandos recording of Beethoven's complete piano and violin sonatas, made with her regular duo partner Martin Roscoe. Little, who recently turned 50, has been releasing new discs at an impressive rate in recent years, notching up at least two a year and sometimes more. However, the fact that she has now recorded the Beethoven sonatas – following on from Schubert chamber works last spring – feels particularly momentous in a discography that has previously reflected her career-long natural musical habitats of the Romantic repertoire and forgotten British gems. Indeed, her last release was classic Tasmin Little territory, featuring the violin concertos of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Haydn Wood.

'When I was younger, my natural expression came through best in big Romantic concertos and sonatas,' she observes. 'Certainly in my early twenties it wouldn't in any way have been right to record Schubert or Beethoven, nor any of that really complex Classical repertoire. I didn't quite have the colours at my fingertips, or the finesse that is required. That was

something that developed and developed, and then through my forties I also found more of my own personal voice in that style.' She then adds, laughing: 'Before, it would have been, "Oh my goodness, that's Tasmin Little and I think she's playing Beethoven!" Whereas now I really hope that it will be, "Oh my goodness, that's Beethoven, and it really sounds like Tasmin!"'

Little's on top form, full of energy and enthusiasm, and we're soon engaged in discussion over the idea of storyline in the sonatas. 'Take the *Spring Sonata's* opening melody,' she enthuses. 'If you start on the E string it could sound tinny. There's an open string to consider. And yet if you begin the movement on the A string that's very covered. So, I elected in the opening to play it in not too overt a way, but still on the more overt E string for that lighter feel. Then, I chose the A string for the repeat of the exposition section, for a more thoughtful quality. Then, when it comes back in the



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recapitulation I chose the E string again, but this time in a more open way because I have the scale that leads me up to it so I could blossom quite naturally. So I brought, hopefully, three very different ideas to the same notes.

There's always a reason why Beethoven has given us that possibility to go back and to do it differently, to make the second hearing an alternative universe to the exposition – and I love that. The repeat is only the same order of notes but at a further point in time.'

The recording process itself was done to a tight schedule, all 10 sonatas being recorded in just two three-day sessions, but, rather than this making the atmosphere tense, Little describes how it contributed to an 'it's now or never' sense of freedom that saw her and Roscoe pushing themselves to new heights – with the C minor Sonata for instance. 'Out of all the 10 works, it's one of the very hardest,' she explains, 'because it's not just a question of everything you have to do technically – you've got to do it together, too. And it was just going so well! So, I pushed myself more to make it as explosive, dangerous and unpredictable as it could possibly be, and Martin picked it up, and at the end of the movement we just looked at each other, kind of shocked! And listening back to it I'm very, very happy; when you listen to a first edit you wonder whether that atmosphere is going to hit you in the same way, but I think it is extremely exciting, and the same thing happened again in the *Kreutzer* Sonata.'

So, in terms of overall sound, what can listeners expect? 'I wanted to bring a really rich texture to it but in a classical way,' she explains. 'Big bold colours, big contrasts, drama, and I also wanted to bring out something of this rather wild element. I think anybody who knows my playing will know that I'm not really going to be making it "mono", but they also won't think, "Oh, she's playing it like she plays Brahms or Elgar". I've changed my vibrato very much on purpose, conscious that I didn't want that amplexness of vibrato I'd use for Brahms but that I still wanted at times to have a really full sound.'

Her vision for the recording balance itself was equally clear. 'Obviously they are works for piano and violin, so we wanted to make sure that this was an extremely equal partnership,' she says. 'Luckily Martin's a big player as well, so there was no danger of it being a violin work with piano accompaniment.'

I must confess that I had worried I'd find Little's interpretation a tad 'too much', bearing in mind her expansive tone and the fact that the sonatas had been recorded with a modern violin set-up and a Steinway grand. Yet, listening to the early edits, what strikes me is just how right they sound. Still, I can't resist asking whether a period set-up would pose any attraction to her, now that she's treading Classical pathways.

'I think the thing is, it isn't my style, and other people are busy doing it,' she replies, not remotely put out at the question. 'If people are going to like my version of it, it's because it is my version, and there will be people who no doubt won't like



'I consider myself still exploring, still developing, and I don't suppose that will stop because I've still got the appetite and energy for it'

it, and that's absolutely fine. But I couldn't possibly do it in any other way – this is the way that excites me. The big difference between who I am now and who I was, player-wise, in my twenties is that I feel that I absolutely can play these pieces, and I feel I absolutely can make a case for them with my own style of playing the violin.'

Little's relationship with the people at Chandos has been crucial in the nurturing of this confidence and development, sending out a powerful message regarding the value of the smaller specialist labels. Not only are they supporting her in the setting down on disc of a huge amount of repertoire, and even allowing her to re-record works such as the Bruch and Walton concertos, but they're also embracing her tremendous variety. Other

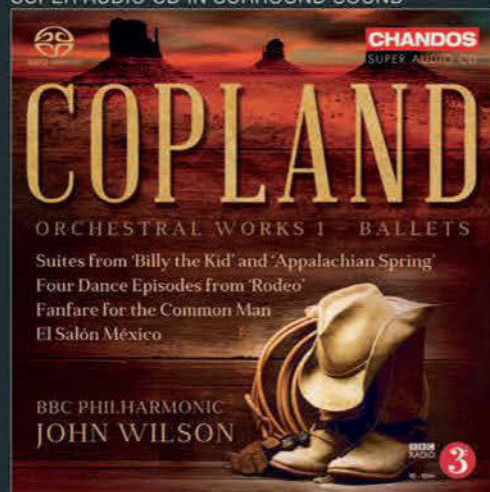
recent recordings include works by Lutosławski, Fauré, Lekeu, Ravel, Strauss and Respighi. 'They haven't said to me, "We want you, but we only want you doing English music",' she says with gratitude, 'and that's a fantastic thing for me at this stage in my life, because I do feel now that I don't just want to be remembered for everything I've hopefully given to British repertoire.'

With the sheer number of recordings and performances on Little's plate, there isn't all that much time left for side projects at the moment. However, she is one of the group of arts lobbyists we have to thank for music being retained in the 2014 National Curriculum, and she remains in close contact with the Incorporated Society of Musicians, which co-ordinated the classical music arm of that battle. 'Whenever there are MPs to be seen or people to be lobbied I'm right there,' she says. 'It's all gone quiet at the moment so hopefully we're all right, but you've just got to keep your eye on it.' In fact, shortly after our interview she's back in Parliament, delivering a speech to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education on the importance of music education in our schools.

Mostly, though, it's all about playing. This month, Little and Roscoe launch their Beethoven recording with a performance of Opp 23, 24 and the *Kreutzer* at London's Wigmore Hall. In May, the second volume of her 'British Violin Sonatas' comes out. She also reels off to me a dizzying list of other repertoire currently piquing her interest, from brand-new works to older, little-known concertos. 'So I consider myself still exploring, still developing,' she concludes, 'and I don't suppose that will stop because I've still got the appetite and the energy for it.' In fact, as our conversation makes a final loop back to the Beethoven, her words sum up my entire impression of what ends up being an invigorating two-hour marathon session together. 'I feel in a way, here I am,' she says thoughtfully. 'I'm probably, at the moment, at the peak of my powers; young enough to have good stamina – and I needed it for this – but not so young that I haven't got my own thoughts on it. They are hopefully mature performances. So now's a good time.' **G**

Gramophone will review Tasmin Little's Beethoven sonatas next month

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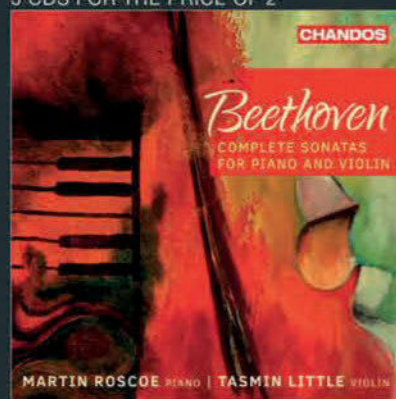
Disc of the Month Copland: Orchestral Works, Vol. 1

BBC Philharmonic / John Wilson

For this new series, the conductor, arranger, and light music specialist John Wilson, a BBC Proms favourite, for the first time joins the BBC Philharmonic on Chandos, in orchestral works by Aaron Copland. As well as the *Fanfare for the Common Man* and *El Salón México*, the first volume features the suites from the American composer's most famous ballets, *Billy the Kid*, *Appalachian Spring*, and *Rodeo*.

CHSA 5164

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Beethoven Complete Violin Sonatas

Tasmin Little / Martin Roscoe

After a much acclaimed complete set of Schubert's violin sonatas with Piers Lane, Tasmin Little joins Martin Roscoe to give each of Beethoven's masterpieces a deeply felt and personal interpretation, full of vitality and idiomatic insight.

DON'T MISS: Launch concert at Wigmore Hall, Wednesday 10 February 2016, 7:30 PM

CHAN 10888(3)

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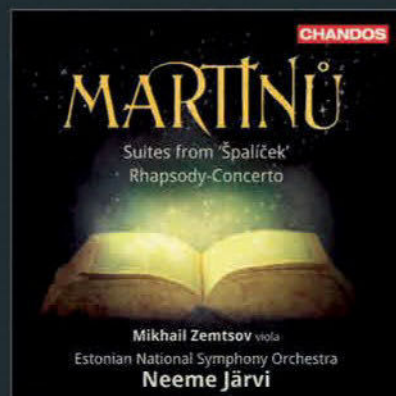


Haydn String Quartets, Vol. 2

The Doric String Quartet devotes their second Haydn volume to Op. 76, the composer's last full set of six string quartets. Including popular works such as the 'Fifths' and 'Emperor', this opus offers a wide diversity of stylistic references, a sense of traversing an entire world of musical possibilities.

DON'T MISS: Launch concert at Wigmore Hall, Sat. - Sun 20-21 February 2016, 7:30 PM

CHAN 10886(2)



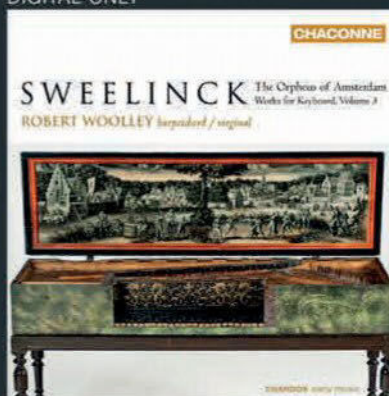
Neeme Järvi conducts Martínů

Mikhail Zemtsov / ENSO
Neeme Järvi

Neeme Järvi continues his highly successful exploration of hidden gems from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here he joins his own Estonian National Symphony Orchestra in two mature works by Martínů, the Rhapsody Concerto for viola and orchestra and Suited from the opera-ballet *Špalíček*.

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DIGITAL ONLY



Sweelinck Works for Keyboard, Vol. 3

Robert Woolley

In this collection of toccatas, fantasias, and variation sets, Robert Woolley, one of Europe's leading performers and teachers of the harpsichord and other early keyboard instruments, performs on a harpsichord or a virginal, as appropriate to the nature of each composition.

CHAN 0811



Rediscovering Haydn, period style

Ottavio Dantone's new disc marks the premiere recordings on period instruments of Haydn's Symphonies Nos 79 and 81. Comprising part of a forthcoming complete period symphony cycle from three different conductors, this recording is further evidence that, on period instruments especially, Haydn sounds fiercely original, writes Richard Wigmore

Back in the 1930s, Donald Tovey famously dubbed Haydn 'the Inaccessible'. In those days most of his music was not even in print, while public performances of his works were confined to a clutch of mainly late symphonies and quartets, plus the two great oratorios. Whole swathes of symphonies numbered in the 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s were as good as unknown. Despite the advocacy of Tovey and conductors such as Beecham and Bruno Walter, Haydn was still a victim of the Romantic view, initiated by ETA Hoffmann, of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven as three stages in an unbroken evolutionary process. He was simultaneously respected as a musical father figure, the 'inventor' of the sonata style, and patronised for his amiability and 'childlike'

'Haydn was looking to the future but he was simultaneously tied to the emotional world of the past. With period instruments, one can better recreate the expression of those emotions' – Ottavio Dantone

naivety: a figure of prelapsarian innocence in an age that revered heroes and rebels. The once-affectionate nickname 'Papa' (which apparently even Haydn's parrot picked up) was now used condescendingly of a composer who – in contrast to the mercurial, ultimately 'tragic' Mozart and the fist-shaking, destiny-defying Beethoven – had spent his career as a liveried servant of the discredited aristocracy.

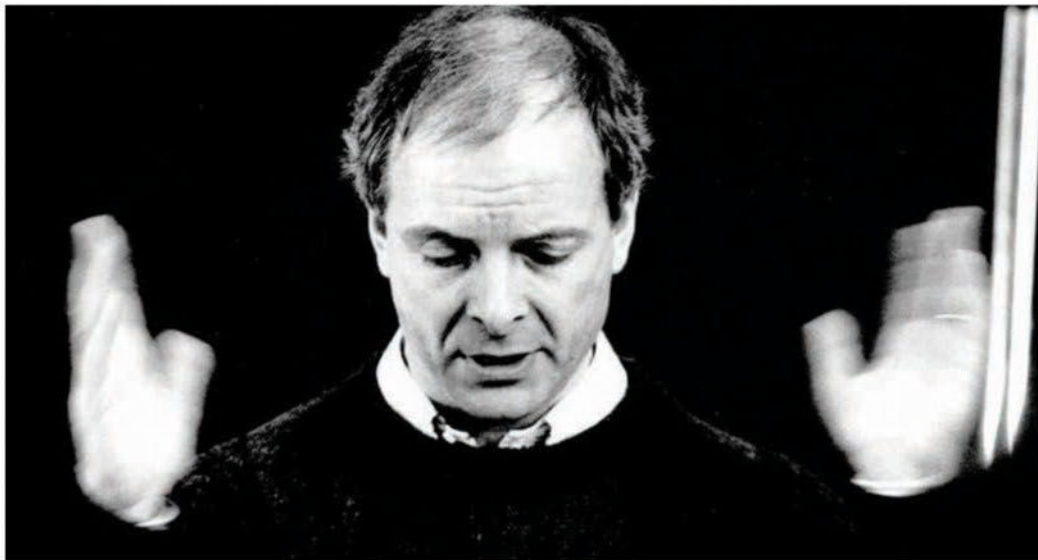
Today, more than two centuries after his death, Haydn has regained much of the prestige he enjoyed in his lifetime. Thanks initially to the pioneering efforts of that indefatigable one-man Haydn industry, HC Robbins Landon, most of his huge output is now available in reliable

critical editions. Virtually his entire oeuvre can now be heard on CD, from the once-unknown operas to the reams of baryton trios he composed to satisfy a strange obsession of Prince Nicolaus Esterházy. Haydn the subversive, Haydn the paradoxical, Haydn the peerless master of complex and subtle games holds a unique fascination both for professional musicians (not least composers) and many music lovers. Like Mozart, he has benefited immeasurably from performances that aim to recreate the colours, balances and articulations of the late 18th century. The results have been to make his works sound even more fiercely original, certainly less comfortable, with their un-Mozartian rough edges sharpened rather than planed. No one can hear, say, Trevor Pinnock's recordings of the *Sturm und Drang* symphonies, or Nikolaus Harnoncourt's 'Paris' set and still talk of dear old 'Papa Haydn'.

And yet...Not even the most fervent Haydn aficionado could claim him as a truly popular composer enjoying the iconic status of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert or Wagner. Tovey notwithstanding, comparisons with Mozart – usually adverse – even now colour many people's perception of Haydn, just as irrelevant comparisons with Brahms long dogged Bruckner. Nor has Haydn ever had record company executives salivating. Riding gloomy boardroom predictions, Antal Dorati's pioneering symphony cycle proved to be one of the unlikely commercial successes of the early 1970s. Two decades later, with the 'authentic' movement in full swing, there appeared three CD cycles on period instruments, from Roy Goodman (Hyperion), Christopher Hogwood (Decca) and Bruno Weil (Sony). Yet by 1996 the writing was on the wall for all three. The old saw about Haydn not selling had again proved depressingly accurate. Decca pulled the plug after 10 volumes and 77 symphonies, Hyperion after 17 discs containing 57 works, and Sony after just seven discs and 21 works. Meanwhile the slowly evolving modern-instrument Haydn symphony cycle from Adám Fischer and his Austro-Hungarian Haydn Orchestra finally reached completion in 2001. For many collectors Fischer superseded his fellow Hungarian Dorati as the benchmark, not least for his livelier tempos, in minuets especially, and an altogether lustier response to Haydn's antic humour.



Above and left: Ottavio Dantone and Accademia Bizantina; their period recordings of four symphonies by Haydn (inset) reveal 'surprise and subversion at every corner'



Christopher Hogwood's period recordings of Haydn's Symphonies Nos 1-77 with the AAM form part of Decca's composite cycle

Sixteen years into the new millennium, an integrated Haydn symphony cycle on period instruments is as elusive as ever. Decca, which came frustratingly close to the finishing line, has done the next best thing and assembled a composite cycle using three different conductors and orchestras: Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music for Nos 1-77, Frans Brüggen and the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century for Nos 82-104 (originally issued by Decca's sister label, Philips), with new versions of the 'missing' Nos 78-81 from Ottavio Dantone and his Accademia Bizantina.

Reflecting on why record companies have been slower to tackle Haydn than Mozart symphonies on period instruments, the Italian harpsichordist-conductor cites the often idiosyncratic nature of the music – one reason why Haydn has always tended to lag behind in popularity. 'On paper, and on a first and perhaps superficial reading, Haydn's music is less communicative to the general public,' he says. 'Mozart – and for that matter Bach – works perfectly on both modern and period instruments. Haydn's music requires close study of the various rhetorical codes and many other details.'

'In general it is easier to bring out the nuances and details of sonority in Haydn's symphonies when they are performed on

period instruments, with Baroque bows and gut strings. Haydn was looking to the future in the structure of his music, but he was simultaneously tied to the emotional world of the past. With period instruments one can better recreate the expression of those emotions, making the musical dialogue easier to grasp on an emotional and formal level. Varied articulation and the selective use of vibrato, *portamento* and *mesa di voce* are all more easily achieved on period instruments, making this music naturally more expressive.'

It would be disingenuous to claim every Haydn symphony as a masterpiece. But from the relatively slight works of the late 1750s and early 1760s, full of colour and energy, to the ripe mastery of the 'Paris' and 'London' sets, nearly every work is gloriously unpredictable in strategy and structure. Many delight in creating miracles from the minimum of material. There is wit and humour aplenty. But, as the American musicologist Daniel Chua put it, 'If you hear only happiness in Haydn the joke is on you.' Far from being the avuncular funster of popular myth, Haydn is in many ways a cerebral composer. Not for nothing has fellow composer Robin Holloway dubbed him 'music's supreme intellectual'.

Ottavio Dantone agrees: 'If we compare Haydn with Mozart, his compositional style is more complex, more refined and seemingly aimed more at connoisseurs. His simplicity is only skin-deep. The way Haydn constructs and interrelates music phrases to create larger forms is incredibly complex. But this complexity is often anything but immediate.'

The four symphonies Dantone has recorded to fill the void date from 1782-84, when Haydn was leading something of a double life as opera impresario at the Esterházy court and composer of instrumental music for the voracious international

market. (Haydn was by then far and away Europe's most bankable composer.) All four works marry a tuneful, 'popular' manner – especially in their finales – with immense compositional sophistication. Surprise and subversion await at every corner, while the symphonies' expressive range makes nonsense of the 'Papa' sobriquet. Perhaps the best known of the four, No 80 in D minor juxtaposes the vehement and the flippant in a way Mozart would never have countenanced. Its first movement opens in churning *Sturm und Drang* mode, then becomes progressively hijacked by a footling Ländler that could have been whistled



Frans Brüggen's take on Symphonies Nos 82-104 – originally released by Philips – are also being reissued for the new cycle

on any Viennese street corner – though the upshot is more unsettling than comic. Haydn the humourist runs riot in the D major finale, whose syncopated opening – fashioned so that we do not initially hear it as syncopated – initiates a movement of controlled comic mayhem.

In contrast to this inspired bizarrerie, the driving, angular opening *Allegro* of No 78 in C minor – the last of a set of three symphonies intended for an aborted trip to England – is wholly serious, exploiting the dramatic and contrapuntal potential of its initial unison motif.

Both these superb minor-keyed symphonies have been recorded before on period instruments, No 78 in Roy Goodman's Hyperion series, No 80 by Gottfried von der Goltz and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra (Harmonia Mundi). But the two major-keyed works, Nos 79 and 81, both rarities, are making their overdue period debuts on disc. The urbane No 79 in F specialises in creating, and then puncturing, an illusion of innocence. Dantone particularly relishes what he calls 'the wild gypsy outbursts' that rough up the otherwise dapper contredanse finale.

Symphony No 81 in G is a richer, more complex work, with a dissonant opening that has subtle and poetic consequences later in the movement and a beautiful theme-and-variations *Andante* on a gently lilting 6/8 melody. Dantone savours the 'extreme contrast between the first movements of the four symphonies', especially the '*Sturm und Drang* turbulence'

*Not for nothing has fellow composer
Robin Holloway dubbed Haydn
'music's supreme intellectual'*

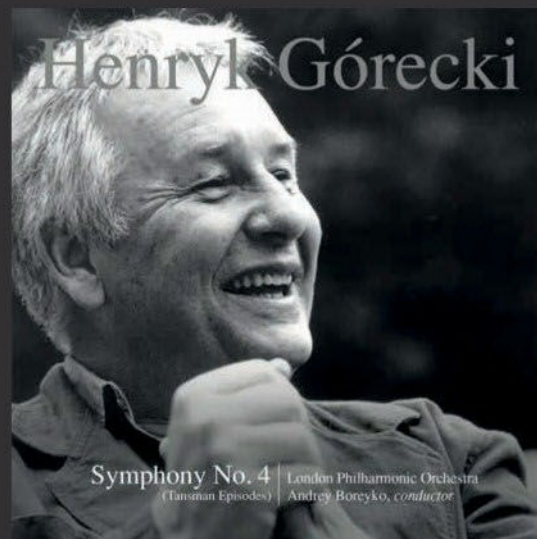
of Nos 78 and 80, where the more astringent timbres of period instruments pay obvious dividends. Yet it was the little-performed and, on the surface, more emotionally equable No 81 that came as something of an epiphany to Dantone.

'I was particularly fascinated by the *Andante*, a profoundly poetic and expressive movement, with a minor-keyed variation of rare poignancy. But in each of the four movements there were many moments of revelation.' He continues: 'It may seem strange to say it, but when away from my studio, in the middle of some mundane activity, I often had sudden insights about particular passages in the score and the extremely subtle emotional dynamics hidden within them. When I tried them out with the orchestra, the insights worked well in practice. It's a truism that one of the joys of this profession is that the more deeply one knows the music, the more intense one's emotional involvement. But it has never been more so than with these four wonderful Haydn symphonies.'

During the rather muted bicentenary celebrations of 2009, it was suggested that Haydn, for all his miraculous inventiveness, was always destined to be something of a connoisseur's composer. If we exclude *The Creation*, the *Nelson Mass* and a handful of late, named symphonies, box-office receipts tend to bear this out. While an imminent integrated period symphony cycle remains a pipe dream, on CD Haydn has never had it so good. Turning Tovey's dictum on its head, 'Haydn the Accessible' – not least the once-sidelined symphonies of the 1770s and early '80s – is there to be discovered by anyone in sympathy with a composer at once companionable, paradoxical and curiously inscrutable. **G** *Ottavio Dantone and Accademia Bizantina's recording of Haydn's Symphonies Nos 78–81 on Decca will be reviewed in the next issue*

PHOTOGRAPHY: LINCOLN RUSSELL/DECCA, MARCELLO MENCARINI/LEBRECHT MUSIC & ARTS

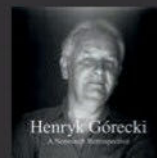
New from Nonesuch Records Henryk Górecki



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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

David Gutman welcomes a unique pairing of two 20th-century violin concertos – the fulfilment of a long-held wish by its star soloist



Britten • Korngold

Britten Violin Concerto, Op 15

Korngold Violin Concerto, Op 35

Vilde Frang *vn* **Frankfurt Radio**

Symphony Orchestra / James Gaffigan

Warner Classics © 2564 60092-1 (58 • DDD)

Collectors of a certain age may look askance at the packaging (there are no fewer than five photographs of the soloist and no one else gets a look-in), but let the carping end there. These are urgently communicative, potentially transformative accounts of scores which, if no longer confined to the fringes of the repertoire, have yet to command universal admiration. Placing them back to back is a risk given their very divergent aesthetic responses to the huge political and moral challenges of their time. So far as I am aware, Gil Shaham and Daniel Hope are the only big-name soloists to have recorded both concertos, never mind actually pairing them. In her brief introduction to the project, Vilde Frang writes that it has long been her wish to bring together two of her favourite concertos. If you've been impressed by her previous releases you'll already have this one marked down as a compulsory purchase and likely Awards contender.

There are several paradoxes at the heart of Frang's captivating performance style. Playing with almost intimidating dexterity and polish, not to mention impeccable intonation (it comes as no surprise to discover that Anne-Sophie Mutter was an early mentor), her music-making still manages to project an impression of honesty and naturalness. An exciting player, she prefers taking chances to playing it safe, in spite of which her interpretations feel airily unforced rather than ostentatious. It's quite a feat and one reliant on supportive collaborators able to unfold a (sometimes unpredictable) musical narrative with



Playing with almost intimidating dexterity and polish, her music-making projects an impression of honesty and naturalness

comparable ease. Fortunately James Gaffigan, whose international career was launched in Frankfurt at the 2004 Sir Georg Solti International Conducting Competition, is with her every step of the way, as is the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra.



Captivating: Vilde Frang in Britten and Korngold

First up is Korngold's escapist confection, and it receives a notably unsentimental reading. This is not to imply that the super-articulate music-making is either cool or predictable. The first-movement cadenza is assaulted with sudden anger, the slow movement played with a clean directness that sounds utterly fresh, at least until a riskily self-conscious inflection just before the end. In the emptier pyrotechnics of the finale Frang comes close to trumping Shaham, if not Heifetz (whose recording is the subject of this month's Classics Reconsidered – see page 96). Her pure, sweet timbre is leaner but she is much assisted by sensitive conducting and the kind of sound engineering that exposes unexpected strands in the orchestral texture rather than unduly spotlighting the star. I found this a deeply satisfying take on a vehicle intended to slake Heifetz's insatiable thirst for technical display rather than to extend Korngold's compositional range. That said, you may feel that the swashbuckling needs a little more *schmaltz* to make it palatable.

From Korngold's Romantic patchwork to Britten's high seriousness (and his obsessive working of scalic material) is quite a leap, yet, with these exponents, there's no hint of the latter overreaching himself in this extended, bleakly eloquent take on the Prokofiev violin concerto model. Indeed, the argument is projected with such searing intensity that the work asserts its claim to be considered one of the masterpieces of the last century. Once again Frang proves immaculate above the stave; and, because the third-movement *passacaglia* never gets bogged down in the manner of Vengerov and Rostropovich or Little and Gardner, the sense of looming threat is ever present through to the equivocal close. While Marwood and Volkov make the whole concerto feel more contemporary, brisker



At the sessions: conductor James Gaffigan and the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra are with Vilde Frang every step of the way

from the outset, texturally spikier and more fractured than Lubotsky with Britten himself as conductor, there are other aesthetic possibilities. Whatever the work's pockets of English reserve, Frang refuses to undersell those passionate outbursts fuelled by the composer's political and moral convictions during and after the Spanish Civil War. This is a remarkable rendition, at once spacious and tautly held together, cool where it needs to be but eminently emotive with just the right kind of 'perilous sweetness'. The soloist's tone is never remotely wiry or frayed and the harmonics are simply sensational.

Here then are two ardent performances to complement or even supplant existing favourites. Such technical inviolability

and emotional truth is born of long familiarity. In 2013 Frang and Gaffigan took the Britten as far afield as Sydney and, as YouTube aficionados will know, the Korngold is an old friend too. That the works' American connections are ably explored in Mervyn Cooke's booklet-note is the icing on the cake. **G**

Korngold – selected comparisons:

Heifetz, Los Angeles PO, Wallenstein

(12/55*) (NAXO) 8 111359

Shabam, LSO, Previn (9/94) (DG) 439 886-2GH

Mutter, LSO, Previn (12/04) (DG) 474 5152GH

Britten – selected comparisons:

Lubotsky, ECO, Britten (8/71, 10/89) (LOND) 417 308-2LM*

Vengerov, LSO, Rostropovich (7/03) (EMI) 984435-2*

Marwood, BBC Scottish SO, Volkov

(3/12) (HYPE) CDA67801

Little, BBC Philb, Gardner (7/13) (CHAN) CHAN10764

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●	LP	aas	all available separately
		oas	only available separately



Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Andrew Mellor listens to Paavo Järvi's Frankfurt Nielsen cycle:

'His big-boned Sixth makes the most of those frantic interruptions and is more poker-faced than Laurel and Hardy' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 33**



Jeremy Nicholas on Hyperion's latest Romantic Piano Concertos:

'Reassuring, as comfortable as Sunday night on the telly – only a hair-shirt cynic could fail to enjoy Rózycki' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**

Avison · D Scarlatti

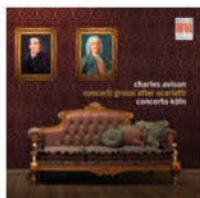
Avison Concerti grossi after Scarlatti –

No 3; No 4; No 5; No 6; No 9; No 11

D Scarlatti Keyboard Sonata, Kk29

Concerto Köln

Berlin Classics (P) 0300702BC (82' • DDD)



Fans of Avison's music sometimes regret that the 12 concertos he published in 1744,

adapted from harpsichord sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti, are better known than his own original works. Yet accomplished as the latter are (and now all available on disc too), they are surely no match for the ear-catching qualities of the 'Scarlatti' concertos. In marrying the long-standing love of the English for Corelli's concerti grossi with their more recently acquired obsession with Scarlatti (and for all that he admitted ironing things out a little), Avison was surely acknowledging a spark of quirky exoticism in the Neapolitan's music that lay beyond the powers of his own more conventional imagination. The skill of his transcriptions, furthermore, is beyond criticism, delivering string concertos of a formal and textural assurance that certainly raises them above the level of curiosity.

Concerto Köln present six of the concertos, thus differing from the Brandenburg Consort under Roy Goodman (Hyperion, 4/95) and the Avison Ensemble under Pavlo Beznosiuk (Linn, 4/09), who offer two-disc sets of all 12. They also propose a different kind of sound, more continental perhaps in its tautness of texture, line and dynamic contrast (boosted by a bassoon on the bass-line) compared to the others' more resonantly recorded, 'English' stringy transparency. Whichever of those you prefer, there is no denying the virtuoso excitement Concerto Köln bring to the finale of Concerto No 6 and the *Con furia* of No 11, or the expressive warmth they find in many of the slow movements. The bonus track of Gerald Hambitzer escaping

continuo duty to play the *Con furia* Sonata in its original form is a nice touch. The booklet-notes make some odd statements – Newcastle buyers will be surprised to read that they inhabit the north-eastern tip of Great Britain – but no matter; this is a gladdening encounter with these fascinating works. **Lindsay Kemp**

CPE Bach

'Concertos & Symphonies, Vol 2'

Sinfonias – H654 Wq179; H667. Flute Concerto, Wq169 H445^a. Cello Concerto, Wq171 H436^b

^aJacques Zoon / ^bBruno Deleplaire vc

Berlin Baroque Soloists / Reinhard Goebel

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi (P) 88875 08397-2

(63' • DDD)



It's odd that Reinhard Goebel chose to open this birthday tribute to CPE Bach with

a trifling G major Sinfonia that may or may not be authentic. If it really is by CPE, it shows him locked on *galant* autopilot. The other works, all from the 1750s, are a different matter. Each of the slow movements tap CPE's characteristic vein of brooding *Empfindsamkeit*, while the first movement of the E flat Sinfonia trades on disconcerting contrasts between explosiveness and fragility – just the kind of music that gave CPE a reputation for 'bizarrerie' in his lifetime.

Recorded before a digitally silenced audience in Berlin's Philharmonie in December 2014, Goebel and his band (a period-instrument offshoot of the Berlin Philharmonic) sound closely attuned to the music's idiosyncratic rhetoric. The outer movements of the E flat Sinfonia, braying horns to the fore, are splendidly combustible, and the *Larghetto* makes its expressive points without undue dawdling. The concerto soloists, both BPO principals, are polished and unfailingly mellifluous. Both specialise in elegance and precision at speed. In Bruno Deleplaire's hands the ungainly-looking figuration in

the Cello Concerto's finale sounds airily graceful, while Jacques Zoon spars impishly with the strings in the effervescent finale of the Flute Concerto.

Other performers, notably Anner Bylsma in the Cello Concerto (Virgin) and Rachel Brown in the Flute Concerto (Hyperion), have brought a more troubled, personal expressiveness to the slow movements. Choosing a far more flowing tempo than the rhapsodically introspective Brown, Zoon seems almost frisky by comparison. Timings – Zoon's 6'13" to Brown's 8'44" – do not mislead. But his cooler, sensitively nuanced playing has its own validity, as does Deleplaire's tonal purity and eloquent, long-spanned phrasing in the *Adagio* of the Cello Concerto. Goebel complements his spirited direction with an engaging if slightly hyperbolic booklet essay on JS Bach's most gifted son, though for specific information on the music you'll have to look elsewhere. **Richard Wigmore**

Beethoven

Symphonies – No 4, Op 60; No 5, Op 67

Concentus Musicus Wien / Nikolaus Harnoncourt

Sony Classical (P) 88875 13645-2 (71' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Goldener Saal, Musikverein, Vienna, May 8-11, 2015



Such is the vitality of these performances recorded live in

Vienna's Musikverein in May 2015, it is difficult to believe that just seven months later, on the eve of his 86th birthday, Nikolaus Harnoncourt announced, 'My bodily strength requires me to cancel my future plans.'

The principal casualty of his retirement has been the cycle of the nine Beethoven symphonies he was planning to give with his own Concentus Musicus Wien in Graz in June 2016. His 1990-91 cycle made with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe (Teldec/Warner, 11/91) is as fine as any in modern times. But for a musician who has been exploring period practice since the 1950s



Going out with a bang: Nikolaus Harnoncourt's recording of Beethoven's Fourth and Fifth Symphonies will be his last

(Harnoncourt and his wife founded *Concentus Musicus* in 1953), it would have been fascinating to hear him close the circle with a period view.

The new account of the Fourth Symphony nicely complements the older Chamber Orchestra of Europe version. The reading itself is much as before, perfectly vital and serene. What is different is a more purposeful tread to the rhythms and some fresh voicings of wind and brass. The orchestra play superbly, though I suspect that the added gravitas has more to do with Harnoncourt's late delvings than with changed sonorities as such.

In the Fifth Symphony the orchestra seems underpowered at first, as if this were one of Haydn's 'London' Symphonies rather than Beethoven at full throttle a decade later. The upper strings seem undernourished throughout, just as the winds and, more particularly, the brass become ever more explosive. In the finale it is the trombones that are given their head, firing broadsides with a fierceness of report the cannons on Nelson's *Victory* would have been proud to deliver. Yet, for all that this is a symphony created in a time of war, such effects are often exaggerated in a way they are not in Harnoncourt's superlative 1990 performance. Tempi, too, were better

integrated in that earlier performance. The new quicker pulse of the third movement trivialises the Scherzo's return midway through the finale, draining it of menace.

And then there is Harnoncourt's late-flowering love of the 'General Pause'. 'Today I have reached the stage where in works of this period I give special emphasis to every General Pause,' he announces in the booklet. There is a hint of this at the start of the third-movement Trio as the double basses dig into the preliminary crotchet C then halt. But that is nothing to what happens at the symphony's end. In the final 13 bars Harnoncourt introduces a series of general pauses between some (but not all) of the C major chords, stopping Beethoven's peroration in its tracks. The effect is the kind of rhythmic disjunction we expect to hear the end of Sibelius's Fifth, not Beethoven's.

It's what the *Generalpause* is designed to do, of course, yet there is not a shred of evidence – nor does Harnoncourt offer any – that this is what Beethoven wanted. You may thrill to the effect, though as Dr Johnson warned, 'It has long been found that specious emendations do not equally strike all minds with conviction.'

That said, I'm rather relieved to hear Harnoncourt going out with a bang rather

than a whimper. He is too courageous a musician to have done anything less.

Richard Osborne

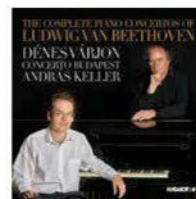
Beethoven

'The Complete Piano Concertos'

Dénes Várjon *pf*

Concerto Budapest / András Keller

Hungaroton © ③ HCD32757/9 (176' • DDD)



These home-grown Hungarian recordings of the five Beethoven piano concertos come

from one of the heartlands of Hungary's never less than vibrant musical culture, the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest. Concerto Budapest is the academy's resident orchestra and both soloist and conductor have close associations with the academy as teachers and chamber musicians. The soloist, 47-year-old Dénes Várjon, made a handful of recordings for Naxos in the 1990s. Rather more recently a Schumann disc in which he partnered cellist Steven Isserlis was widely admired (Hyperion, 5/09).

Várjon is at his most plausible in Beethoven's two early concertos and in the

slow movements. I say plausible because it is never long before doubts begin to occur. There is crispness and dash aplenty in his playing of the B flat Second Concerto, albeit in too persistently *staccato* a manner. That evenness of touch and finely manicured finger *staccato* which we have from the very finest Beethovenians is too little apparent here. Equally there is a lack of pathos and expressive power in the high-lying semi- and demisemiquaver passages towards the close of the slow movement. Where with a Kempff or a Gilels the music is already *echt*-Beethovenian, here it sounds too much like Clementi on a good day. This is a deficiency, needless to say, which becomes chronic in the Fourth Concerto's opening movement.

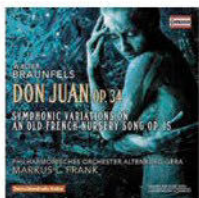
Both early finales get off to slightly rocky starts. In the B flat Concerto Várjon blurs the second bar of Beethoven's brilliantly articulated game of musical hide-and-seek. Then in the solo dash which launches the finale of the C major First Concerto, Várjon's left hand – a particularly strong and agile left hand – is over-intrusive. By giving undue prominence to what is merely an accompanying figure in bars 4-6, he subverts the bass's witty and decisive four-note interjection in bar 8.

In the Third Concerto, an unusually aggressive reading of the first movement is followed by an exceptionally fine account of the slow movement. In the Fourth Concerto, after that disappointing opening movement, Várjon treats the finale as a kind of Mozartian jest. This works rather well. He is less successful, however, with the Promethean jests which help drive the *Emperor* Concerto's epic finale.

Concerto Budapest are a medium-sized ensemble with vibrato-light strings in the modern style. Their playing is competent rather than first-rate, as are the Hungaraton recordings, which veer towards harshness, and have too many perceptible edits between solo and tutti passages. **Richard Osborne**

Braunfels

Don Juan, Op 34. Symphonic Variations on an Old French Nursery Song, Op 15
Altenburg-Gera Philharmonic Orchestra / Markus L Frank
Capriccio © C5250 (50' • DDD)



Braunfels's *Don Juan* dates from 1924, when the composer's reputation was riding high. Furtwängler conducted its premiere and the piece remained in the Austro-German repertory until 1933, when the

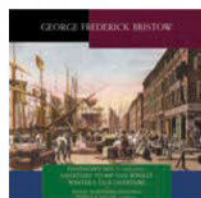
Nazis proscribed Braunfels's output in its entirety. Tackling an orchestral work on the subject of Don Juan in the wake of Strauss's tone-poem might seem provocative, but having suggested the comparison the piece paradoxically refutes it, since what Braunfels gives us, in fact, is a set of variations on themes from *Don Giovanni*.

His imagination was clearly fired by the figures of the Don himself and the Commendatore as his nemesis. The principal theme is 'Fin ch'han dal vino', heard in its entirety after a lengthy introduction that pulls in both the D minor scales from the opera's Overture and the trombone chords that accompany 'Di rider finirai pria dell'aurora'. The seven variations that follow depict a conflict between reckless existential vitality and the crushing forces of divine retribution. It's not particularly erotic. From the third variation onwards, however, the thematic material twists its way towards 'Là ci darem la mano', though Braunfels refrains from direct quotation until the closing bars. The closest Straussian comparison, bizarrely perhaps, is with his use of the *Eroica*'s Funeral March in the final pages of *Metamorphosen*.

Strauss's *Don Juan* was, however, a major influence on the *Symphonic Variations on an Old French Nursery Song*, dating from 1909. It's an oddly discursive piece, but at its climax unison horns peal out a variant of its principal theme beneath high string tremolos, a gesture nothing short of derivative. The performances, meanwhile, make up in panache for what they lack in finesse. Markus L Frank drives both works hard, and the energy of *Don Juan* is particularly infectious. The Altenburg-Gera orchestra's woodwind can be shrill, however, the brass blare a bit and the string tone can be patchy. A flawed disc, but fascinating. **Tim Ashley**

Bristow

Symphony No 2, 'Jullien', Op 24. Rip van Winkle – Overture. Overture, 'A Winter's Tale', Op 30
Royal Northern Sinfonia / Rebecca Miller
New World © 80768-2 (62' • DDD)



Rebecca Miller follows up her disc of music by the American composer Henry Kimball Hadley (Dutton, 10/15) with a symphony and two overtures by his somewhat earlier compatriot, George Frederick Bristow, an exact contemporary of Johann Strauss II. It's Schumann rather than the Waltz King, though, who was

evidently Bristow's chief model in his D minor Second Symphony (1853), named after the conductor Louis Antoine Jullien, who commissioned it.

Melodic and rhythmic contours, not to mention his treatment of the orchestra, instantly bring the Zwickauer to mind in the first movement of the symphony, notwithstanding an episode in the development that could almost be a straight lift from Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony. The intermezzo-like *Allegretto* has a Mendelssohnian lightness about it; the third-movement *Adagio* is perhaps the finest of the four, melodically speaking; and the finale is nervy and intense, crowned by a brass-bedecked denouement (think Mendelssohn's *Scottish* Symphony). It's an ambitious work, lasting almost three quarters of an hour, and is played with conviction by the Royal Northern Sinfonia, whose chamber dimensions do much to clarify voices and textures. (The recording of 'Symphony No 2' by the Detroit SO under Neeme Järvi – Chandos, 10/93 – is in fact of the Third Symphony in F sharp minor, Op 26, of five years later.)

A pair of single-movement works fill up the disc: both the Overture to his opera *Rip van Winkle* and the concert overture referring to scenes in Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* were in progress during preparations for the first performance of the Second Symphony and attest to Bristow's orchestral skill. Nevertheless, it's no surprise that Bristow isn't hailed as one of music's great originals – he just wasn't that original, for all his technical ability. Comprehensive scholarly annotation by Katherine K Preston complements a project that should anyway pique the interest of those curious about 19th-century New York orchestral life.

David Thresher

Ginastera

'Orchestral Works, Vol 1'
Estancia, Op 8^a. Ollantay, Op 17.
Pampeana No 3, Op 24
^aLucas Somoza Osterc *spkr/bar*
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Juanjo Mena
Chandos © CHAN10884 (66' • DDD)



This is Ginastera's centenary year. If he died way too young (aged just 67, in 1983), his legacy still leaves him as one of the two or three finest composers to have come from South America. The suite from his early ballet *Estancia* (1941) remains one of



Rebecca Miller: flying the flag for lesser-known American symphonists with a disc of works by George Frederick Bristow

his best-known and most-played works but the whole ballet (weighing in at just over 34 minutes here) is less familiar. Gisele Ben-Dor's vibrant *Conifer* account, reissued by Naxos, set the bar high, but Mena and the BBC Philharmonic sail through it with verve. On first hearing I wondered if there could have been a touch more impulsion in the faster sections but, on reflection, I think Mena pitches it just about perfectly. Lucas Somoza Osterc is rich-voiced and a touch less histrionic than Luis Gaeta.

Pampeana No 3 (1954) is one of Ginastera's less unfamiliar pieces, a marvellous triptych evocative of the Argentine pampas. Recorded several times before – even by Chandos – this is the most sumptuous-sounding version to date. The contemplative opening is beautifully phrased and paced, succeeded by a really wild *Impetuosamente*. Best of all is the *Largo con poetica esaltazione* finale, hugely atmospheric, compellingly performed to a degree that eluded the Louisville Orchestra.

The above leaves little room for me to wax lyrical about *Ollantay* (1949), Ginastera's dramatic symphonic triptych on the pre-Columbian legend of the Son of the Earth, *Ollantay*. There is some fabulous solo playing here, not least from

the BBC Philharmonic's principal flute, that the listed rivals don't quite match. Bring on Vol 2!

Guy Rickards

Estancia – selected comparison:

Gaeta, LSO, Ben-Dor (1/99) (NAXO) 8 557582*

Ollantay, Pampeana No 3 – selected comparison:

Odense SO, Wagner (10/03) (BRID) BRIDGE9130

Louisville Orch, Whitney (FIRS) FECD0015

Ollantay – selected comparison:

BBC NOW, Ben-Dor (NAXO) 8 570999

Pampeana No 3 – selected comparison:

Berlin SO, Castagna (10/03) (CHAN) CHAN10152

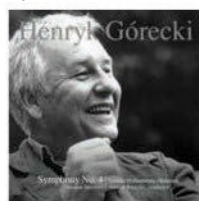
Górecki

Symphony No 4, 'Tansman Episodes'

London Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrey Boreyko

Nonesuch © 7559 79503-4 (36' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London, April 12, 2014



would be misleading to attribute such a long hiatus to some kind of symphonic 'composer's block'. The unexpected success of the Third during the 1990s may have

played on Górecki's mind during the intervening years (indeed, the Fourth remained incomplete when he died in 2010, leaving his son Mikołaj to orchestrate the work), but in many respects the two pieces could not be further apart. If the evocation of sorrow and loss lies at the heart of the Third, then the Fourth rails against the fading of the mortal light, defiantly shaking its fist at death.

The rise and swell of the Third is replaced here by a fractured and fissured intensity, projected purposefully on this live recording of the work's 2014 world premiere by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Andrey Boreyko. The Fourth Symphony seems haunted by relentless repetitions and a disruptive, disfigured continuity, but shafts of light do occasionally illuminate its dark corners. A rambunctious theme in horns and trombones opens the third movement – a kind of minuet and trio. The first section evokes Mahler in its bucolic boisterousness, while the plangent sonorities of the contrasting section (effectively a trio for piano, violin and cello) call to mind the 'Louange à l'éternité de Jésus' from Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*. Likewise, the fourth movement sets off on a twisting, dance-like detour, animated

by mischievous folk-like turns on clarinets and oboes.

There is something of a tonal twist at the end, too, but no sooner are we out of the woods than we are dragged back in by the hammer-like blows of the work's opening and closing theme, itself a musical cryptogram taken from the name of the Polish-born composer Alexandre Tansman (1897-1986). The Fourth Symphony is ostensibly a homage to Tansman; after all, his name generates the work's principal thematic ideas. In reality, it stands as an impressive musical mausoleum to the many elements that comprised Górecki's own language – a powerful and personal farewell from one of the 20th century's most distinctive voices. **Pwyll ap Siôn**


Hillborg

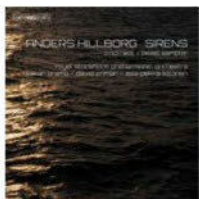
Beast Sampler^a. O dessa ögon^b.

Cold Heat^c. Sirens^d

^{bd}Hannah Holgersson, ^dIda Falk Winland *sops*

^dEric Ericson Chamber Choir; ^dSwedish Radio Choir; Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra / ^{ab}Sakari Oramo, ^dEsa-Pekka Salonen, ^dDavid Zinman

BIS  BIS2114 (62' • DDD/DSD • T/d)



Beast Sampler was well received at last year's Proms and you can hear in its glacial

coolness and spatial breadth why it might have stilled a hot Royal Albert Hall. That night it shared the bill with Sibelius's *Tapiola*, and there are certain parallels; Hillborg's piece – sometimes without pitch, sometimes catching tonality's fleeting glance – suggests an animalistic terror lurking inside its own forest of notes. *Cold Heat* is a sort of sonic ice mountain with an inner glow. But given all the breadth either side, I found the limited scope of its agitated central section ill-fitting.

In *Cold Heat* we catch a glimpse of the heaving oceanic sonorities of *Sirens*. To my ears Hillborg is at his best when writing for voices and there are plenty of them here: two sopranos attempting to manipulate Ulysses with increasing desperation (the text is Hillborg's own) and a choir merged with the large orchestra. Hillborg can really yank you into the narrative with his text-setting (notably the solo entry on 'This way...') and there are copious moments in the ensuing dreamscape that linger in the mind, not least the sirens' sensual promise that 'we will take you to the crack between our worlds', orchestra twisting like metal underneath (I easily deciphered that text without the booklet).

Hillborg's music is taken to its own cosmic heights by that text but there are shades of John Luther Adams here, just as there's a Baltic whiff to his simple, tonal song 'O dessa ögon'. Rich, sonorous playing from Oramo's orchestra under all three conductors, and singing full of purity, accuracy and fresh air above it; both soloists are agile, strong and able to tell a story. But that all comes from what Hillborg writes for them. *Sirens* should be heard. **Andrew Mellor**

Hosokawa

Arc Song^a. Lied^b. Stunden-Blumen:

Hommage à Olivier Messiaen^c.


Voyage - VIII^d; X, 'Nozarashi'^e

^bHelen Bledsoe *fl* ^aPeter Veale *ob* ^dMelvyn Poore

tuba ^eTadashi Tajima *shakuhachi* ^bUlrich Löffler *pf*

^aMirjam Schröder *hp* ^{ace}Ensemble Musikfabrik /

^dPeter Rundel, ^eIlan Volkov

Wergo  WER6860-2 (57' • DDD)



The music of Toshio Hosokawa (b1955) is often said to synthesise Eastern philosophy

(Zen Buddhism) with Western aesthetics (Expressionism). But 'synthesis' suggests something stable, and Hosokawa's distinctiveness lies in his ability to confront the obvious cultural tensions between the Japan of his birth and the Germany of his compositional studies in a constructive spirit that does justice to the complexity of the technical and spiritual factors involved.

In these recordings, made between 2009 and 2013, Hosokawa has the advantage of working with Musikfabrik, one of the very best specialist contemporary-music ensembles, and with recording teams sensitive to the delicate textural ebbing and flowing on which his music depends. The disc is framed by two substantial works from the ongoing *Voyage* series. No 8 for tuba and ensemble (2006) presents the brass behemoth as a dramatic protagonist who is both at odds with and a resourceful confederate of the supporting instrumental group. No 10 for shakuhachi and ensemble (2009) has a more flexibly melodic solo line and a wider expressive trajectory: this is one of Hosokawa's most beguiling exercises in intersecting phases of abrasiveness and refinement.

Stunden-Blumen: Hommage à Olivier Messiaen (2008), using the same instrumental quartet as Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, is a no less outstanding example of Hosokawa's ability to explore expressive depths without awkwardly pushing at the boundaries of what actually works technically. The focus is on the delicately

perfumed pathos of ephemeral 'hour-blooms'; yet, as with all the music on the disc, including the two short duos that complete the programme, suggestions of delicacy and evanescence do not result in music that is precious or effete. With Hosokawa, it is the substance that impresses.

Arnold Whittall

Ives

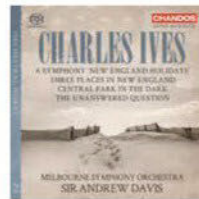
'Orchestral Works, Vol 2'

A Symphony: New England Holidays. Orchestral Set No 1, 'Three Places in New England'. Central Park in the Dark. The Unanswered Question

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra /

Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos  CHSA5163 (72' • DDD/DSD)



The two early Ives symphonies recorded by the same team (5/15) are relatively

plain sailing compared with some of these pieces, which are just as shocking as they always have been. I mean the great blasts of glorious frenzy in *Central Park in the Dark* (the piano melody is the 1899 song hit 'Hello, my baby'); 'The Fourth of July'; and the second and third movements of *Three Places in New England*, all written – amazingly – in the early years of the last century. The difference between the many recordings depends on which elements of an overcrowded texture are allowed to dominate. For example, Ives quotes his own *Country Band March* in 'Putnam's Camp' – it's first heard early on in the strings, but at the last climax, with everything else going on as well, it's less prominent with the Melbourne performance than in some. That's all part of the richness of the Ives experience.

Another aspect is the work editors have had to do with these scores and the trouble conductors must still take to mobilise such pieces in the first place. Andrew Davis, in a supplementary note, admits that the distant sounds in 'Thanksgiving' and 'Forefathers' Day' were recorded separately as the only way of making them audible. The four works comprising *A Symphony: New England Holidays* are best performed individually but it's a rare opportunity to have them all together here.

The Unanswered Question is quintessential Ives. The flute chorus is too loud at first and different recordings don't agree about the final note of the trumpet solo – but that's Ives too. Bringing all these pieces together in dedicated modern performances, with imaginative balance decisions, this disc is a welcome landmark. **Peter Dickinson**



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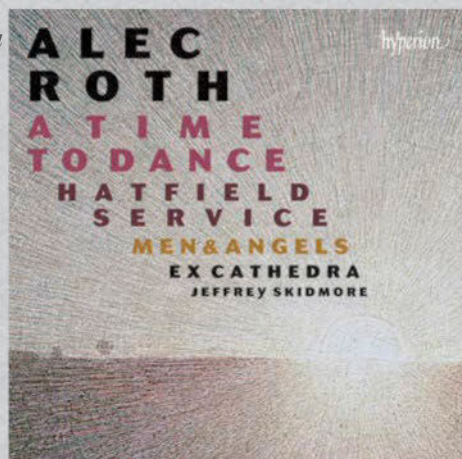
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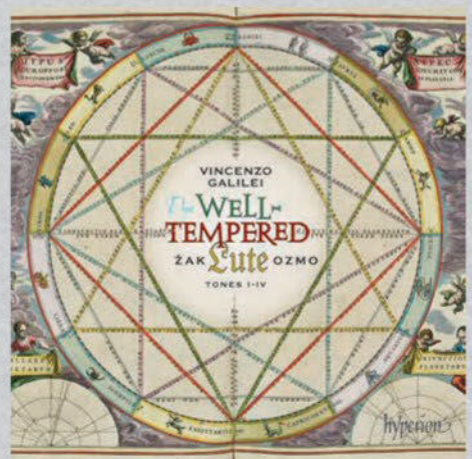
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Mendelssohn

'Mendelssohn in Birmingham, Vol 4'

Violin Concerto, Op 64^a. A Midsummer Night's Dream, Op 61 – Incidental Music^b

^bRhian Lois, ^bKeri Fuge *sops* ^aJennifer Pike *vn*

^bCBSO Youth Chorus; City of Birmingham

Symphony Orchestra / Edward Gardner

Chandos ㉔ CHSA5161 (68' • DDD/DSD)



Jennifer Pike works hard, perhaps against the grain, to counter the impression of

prettiness that Mendelssohn's music still leaves in the minds of many listeners, not excluding the Violin Concerto. Her pared-back, vibrato-free approach to the descending sequence that prepares the second theme (3'30'') is a simple and effective response to Mendelssohn's *tranquillo* marking – one of his many Protestant cautions against showmanship on the part of the soloist – and the theme itself is chastely done.

Even so, the unflustered *cantabile* of the work's opening – relaxed, yet *in medias res* – gives notice that Pike will not court the nervous, even aggressive intensity of another recent against-the-grain violinist, Augustin Hadelich on Avie. She also receives more positive orchestral support from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Edward Gardner, who has proved himself a warmly expressive interpreter of the composer in a series of Chandos recordings.

The chosen excerpts from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* do not include the melodramas designed to accompany speech and in that sense Gardner is no rival to Thomas Dausgaard (BIS, 1/16), but in truth neither of them need fear competition from older rivals on record. Gardner cultivates a smoother *legato* during the Overture but he is no less receptive to the score's magic and mischief. As befits a 'Mendelssohn in Birmingham' series, the 'Spotted Snakes' are sung in English, and with splendid clarity, but it's the pointed commentaries from flute and clarinet that really catch the ear. The level of fine detail throughout is a credit to the CBSO and Gardner, to the recording team and of course to Mendelssohn, for making every note a telling one. **Peter Quantrill**

Violin Concerto – selected comparison:

Hadelich, Norwegian Rad Orch, Hartb-Bedoya

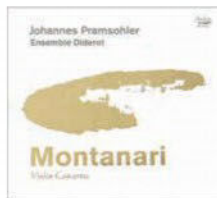
(8/15) (AVIE) AV2323

Montanari

Violin Concertos, Op 1 – No 1; No 5; No 6; No 7; No 8. Violin Concerto, 'Dresden'

Ensemble Diderot / Johannes Pramsohler *vn*

Audax ㉔ ADX13704 (59' • DDD)



'One is right always to be more than a little cautious about pleading in favour

of the admission of a previously ignored composer to the modern performing repertoire,' writes Michael Talbot in the foreword to this world premiere recording of violin concertos by the Baroque composer and violinist Antonio Maria Montanari (1676-1737). However, Talbot, along with other notable musicologists, firmly believes that this forgotten Italian's concertos are some of the finest of the period, and the expressed purpose of this recording is to give the CD-buying public a taste of his music in the hope of initiating a revival. I hope it works, because, in my book at least, the musical strength of these works more than matches their genuine stylistic distinctiveness.

The disc presents four of a group of eight concertos for one or two violins published in Amsterdam around 1730, plus a probably later concerto collected by Quantz (conversely, the least interesting of the lot). A whistlestop description of the Montanari sound would include harmonic inventiveness and greater virtuoso demands made of the principal violinist than with Corelli's works (although still less than with Vivaldi). Also light textures, which are accentuated by a viola part not always being included, and continuo often played without a bowed bass, theorbo or lute.

It's all music that would shine through even in merely adequate performances, but Ensemble Diderot's one-to-a-part readings on original instruments are truly superb, translating what have evidently been intense scholarly labours into a recording that sparkles with enjoyment and understanding of the music. Set within the warmly supportive acoustic of Toblach's Gustav Mahler Saal, limpid crispness and zing sing out over a deliciously mellifluous overall balance. Then, the clean, lyrical virtuosity from principal violinist Johannes Pramsohler, and indeed from harpsichordist Philippe Grisvard, is of the kind that begs you to simply sit back and soak it all up. Listen to the perfection of Pramsohler's double-stopping in No 1's second movement or his rapid arpeggiated chords in the *Grave* of No 8. Equally to savour is the duetting between Pramsohler and second violinist David Wish, for instance their delicate dovetailing in No 1's lilting, *siciliano*-like third movement. If only all newly discovered Baroque works sang and fizzed like those in this collection do. **Charlotte Gardner**

Nielsen

'Works for Violin, Vol 2'

Violin Concerto, Op 33. Prelude and Theme with Variations, Op 48. Prelude and Presto, Op 52

Cecilia Zilliacus *vn* Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra / Daniel Blendulf

dB Productions ㉔ DBCD162 (66' • DDD)



No one takes on the Nielsen Violin Concerto lightly. Its technical demands are

not a whit less than those of the Sibelius Concerto, and its range of moods is wider – from neo-baroque monumentality at the opening, through a 'chivalric' Allegro to a frisky finale, by way of passages of dreamily poetic wonder. Artists of the order of Vengerov and Znaider certainly have all the required instrumental command. But others such as the Norwegian Vilde Frang and now the Swede Cecilia Zilliacus show a subtler appreciation of the idiom. Flexible yet sturdy, Zilliacus treats the concerto like a special friend whom she is proud and delighted to share with anyone in her orbit. Daniel Blendulf and his Helsingborgians are sympathetic partners, and the balance between soloist and orchestra is a fraction more realistic than with Frang and the Danish Radio (who, however, show an even keener appreciation for Nielsen's quieter moments).

Couplings are clearly an issue. The two solo works from Nielsen's last decade are among his most quirkily experimental creations, and you might well prefer them to yet another Tchaikovsky (Frang), Bruch (Znaider) or Sibelius concerto (Vengerov). You can find them elsewhere, of course, including from the passionate and dramatic, if in places rather rough Georgios Demertzis on BIS (with the two numbered sonatas for violin and piano). Zilliacus is more even-tempered, less eager to showcase her own considerable talents, yet also cleaner in execution, and for that reason more able to follow the music's zig-zag imaginative course. Excellently recorded, and with an intelligent, sensitive essay from the violinist herself, this adds up to a thoroughly recommendable issue.

David Fanning

Violin Concerto – selected comparisons:

Vengerov, Chicago SO, Barenboim

(9/96⁺) (APEX) 2564 67300-5

Znaider, LPO, Foster (4/01⁺) (EMI) 341421-2

Frang, Danish RSO, Jensen (9/12) (EMI) 602570-2

Solo works – selected comparison:

Demertzis, Asteriadou (12/03) (BIS) BIS-CD1284



Johannes Pramsohler leads Ensemble Diderot in a premiere recording of Montanari concertos that 'sparkles with enjoyment and understanding of the music'

Nielsen

Complete Symphonies (Nos 1-6)

Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Paavo Järvi

RCA Red Seal © 88875 17880-2 (3h 30' • DDD)



'I still don't understand how there can be no word for "please"

and no phrase for "nice to meet you",' chirrup the Liverpooldian girl in my Danish class on an almost weekly basis. Get used to it. Abruptness is as much a part of Danish literature and music as it is built into the nation's syntax. Nielsen's first four symphonies barge into being with gestures that might be considered rude outside Denmark, but conductors of all nationalities have a responsibility to underline their grinning gameplay and coruscating contradictions without sweetening the pill.

In that sense, Paavo Järvi is hit and miss. The First Symphony's opening bars could do with more punch, and the shock of the 'wrong key' opening to the symphony's last movement is...well, not enough of a shock. Järvi's Second Symphony has an appropriately incendiary opening, but the

particle-accelerator thwacks that generate the Third's momentum could do with more point and precision to compete with Myung-Whun Chung, Bryden Thomson or Herbert Blomstedt. The Fourth's opening, like a gargantuan can opener ripping into the metal flesh of an oil tanker, could likewise use more wrenching fright and twisting horror.

When Järvi's good, he's pretty good. There's some fascinating revealing of unlikely counterpoints in the Second Symphony (you hear the scurrying strings after that obnoxiously cavorting bass trombone) and the same in the Third (the waltz breakout of the first movement is well balanced but it could do with a little more spontaneity). The finale of Järvi's Second nicely foreshadows the fissile qualities of the later pieces and the way the tension ratchets up in the opening movement of the Fifth demonstrates his abilities to plot Nielsen's long narratives as well as Alan Gilbert. His big-boned Sixth Symphony makes the most of all those frantic interruptions and is more poker-faced than Laurel and Hardy. The Frankfurt violins can have a metallic sound, some way off those of Sakari Oramo's Royal Stockholm Philharmonic in tonal allure, but they're bang-on in the precision, high-wire passages in this piece. Interplay between

tuba, drum, glockenspiel and bass clarinet is charming. In the percussion stakes, Järvi's cycle wins over all others; its timpanist has thin sticks and uses them fearlessly to create a constantly unsettling, cutting sound across all three discs.

So what's not to like? As with those occasionally flaccid opening gestures, Järvi can sometimes be tempted to ease back into a sense of Romantic grandeur. Like many others, including Schönwandt and Chung, he initiates a grandstanding (unmarked) *rallentando* at the end of the Third's first movement that doesn't fit with the door-closing endings that are so important in Nielsen's music and retain such a clear legacy in Danish composition today. Järvi can also drift sometimes. As much as those wound-up moments in the Fourth Symphony are tight and precise – some listeners might feel they could be even more super-charged – the tension remains in this music even when it doesn't appear to be doing as much but Järvi sometimes allows it to slacken.

To be even more pedantic, those moments when Nielsen's music breaks out in lyricism have to be imbued with some sense of earthy purity if they're not to sound cosy and Romantic (which those abrupt openings, combined with Nielsen's



Jonathan Plowright recording Różycki with Łukasz Borowicz and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra for Hyperion (review page 36)

whole aesthetic viewpoint, dictate they shouldn't). Schönwandt lets his Danish National Symphony Orchestra enjoy them while also playing them pretty straight. Järvi can sometimes appear stuck in the middle; the lyrical breakouts in the Fourth don't grab you and his strings are a touch too sentimental (at the expense of muscle) in the slow movement of the Third. If a conductor chooses a point on the horizon and maintains focus on it in this flat-landscaped movement, the problem is usually avoided (Chung is superlative here).

Some isolated examples there, and there are more. But there is some fine Nielsen-playing here, even if that last dose of authenticity so vital to this insistent, singular music can evade Järvi and his orchestra on occasion. I'll return to Järvi's Second, Fifth and Sixth Symphonies and am touched by his German orchestra's commitment to Nielsen in concert and on record. But my personal top three modern cycles – Oramo, Chung and Schönwandt – remain unchallenged. Few pleasantries there. **Andrew Mellor**

Selected comparisons:

Gothenburg SO, Chung (7/93) (BIS) BIS-CD614/16

Royal Stockholm PO, Oramo (5/14, 3, 15, 6/15)

(BIS) BIS2028, BIS2048, BIS2128 (oas)

Danish Nat SO, Schönwandt (DACA) 8 206002

Prokofiev

Piano Concertos – No 4, Op 53^a; No 5, Op 55^b.
Symphonies – No 4 (revised version), Op 112;
No 6, Op 111; No 7, Op 131^c

^bSergei Babayan, ^aAlexei Volodin *pf*
Mariinsky Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

Mariinsky (M) (2) (D) MAR0577 (158' • DDD/DSD)

^aRecorded live, April 25, 2012



Prokofiev died on the same night as Joseph Stalin: there were no flowers left

for the funeral and press coverage was scant and tardy. Today's Russian leadership takes a different view of the composer's patriotic indispensability and President Putin himself has endorsed the drive to put Prokofiev centre stage in his 125th anniversary year. Not that Valery Gergiev will have needed any encouragement to embark on this oddly random clutch of remakes.

Is it a case of 'Never mind the quality, feel the width'? While these new concerto recordings outpace Gergiev's 1990s collaborations with the pianist Alexander Toradze, all three symphonies have slackened. The change is most

striking in the first two movements of the Sixth, lower-voltage conceptions in which the jolting immediacy of 2004 is supplanted by a more distanced kind of reflectiveness, only partly a matter of microphone placement. In St Petersburg 2015, string lines are shaped with surprising affection. The argument, less obviously stage-managed, is never hectoring but, as is sometimes the case with this overworked team, a potentially revelatory rethink is compromised by pockets of neutral, weary-sounding playing. Woodwind passages are flattened, rhythms blurred. Honours are more equally divided in the Seventh Symphony, a grander yet more poignant reading than its predecessor with a muted fairy-tale character for the first appearance of the big tune. The optimistic final flourish Prokofiev tacked on to the work in pursuit of Stalin Prize winnings is wisely eschewed. Opting for Prokofiev's 1947 recasting of the Fourth, Gergiev is as successful as anyone in making this curious hybrid feel through-composed and credibly Soviet.

The band's distinctive timbre creates an aura of authenticity. So too does Alexei Volodin's sensitive account of the Fourth Piano Concerto (intended as a

vehicle for the picky one-handed Paul Wittgenstein). Enjoying superior sound quality, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet is wittily deadpan, but I have to say that I preferred the Russian. Sergei Babayan, another executant featured in Gergiev's single-evening Prokofiev concerto extravaganzas at home and abroad, makes a marginally shallower sound on a different instrument as captured at the Moscow Conservatoire in 2012. His quickfire traversal of the Fifth's Toccata leaves the rest of the field on the starting blocks.

That such unrelenting coruscation lacks heart is ultimately Prokofiev's fault, for all that Daniel Jaffé's booklet-note invites us to dig beneath the pianistic stunts. There remains one final potential obstacle: the maestro's intrusive groaning at emotive points. Applause in the live performances has been expunged.

David Gutman

Symphonies – selected comparison:

LSO, Gergiev

(6/06) (PHIL) 475 7655PM4

Concertos – selected comparisons:

Toradze, Mariinsky Tb Orch, Gergiev

(4/98*) (DECC) 478 3952DM2

Bavouzet, BBC PO, Noseda

(3/14) (CHAN) CHAN10802

Respighi

Ancient Airs and Dances – Suite No 1.

Il tramonto^a. *Trittico Botticelliano*. *Gli uccelli*

^aIsabel Bayrakdarian *sop*

Laval Symphony Orchestra / Alain Trudel

ATMA Classique © ACD2 2732 (67' • DDD • T/T)



This beautifully programmed disc is in many ways let down by the work that to all intents and purposes forms its *raison d'être*, the 1914 'lyric poem' *Il tramonto* for female voice and strings. A setting of Shelley's 'The Sunset', it's an exercise in post-Romantic morbidity that has links with the Italian Symbolist movement, which took Shelley as a source of inspiration. The booklet-notes evoke *Tristan* as a comparison for its night-obsessed lovers, though the syllabic vocal line, carefully following the contours of spoken Italian, reveals the deeper influence of Debussy's *Pelléas*, while the finely wrought string-writing suggests that Respighi was familiar with Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*.

Notable interpreters on disc include Irmgard Seefried, Anne Sofie von Otter and Magdalena Kožená, and this new version,

from the Canadian ATMA label, is not quite in the same league. Isabel Bayrakdarian's declamatory way with the text impresses but the close recording catches a pulse in her tone and some curious moments of shrillness at the top. Well aware that if you push the piece too hard it becomes self-indulgent, Alain Trudel conducts with admirable restraint. The playing is clean and clear but the Laval orchestra's very bright string sound sits at times uneasily with a work that trades primarily in crepuscular half-tones.

This is a shame, because the rest of the disc is rather fine. Trudel's no-nonsense way with Respighi speaks volumes in the first set of *Ancient Airs and Dances*, which are done with plenty of wit and elegance. The bright orchestral sound comes into its own in *Trittico Botticelliano*, where the textures are nicely clear and sensuous. Best of all, though, is *Gli uccelli*, where the playing is excellent, the instrumental solos particularly graceful and poised. It's very enjoyable, provided *Il tramonto* is not your main focus of interest: if that is the case, however, then Irmgard Seefried and the Lucerne Festival Strings under Rudolf Baumgartner remain unsurpassed. **Tim Ashley**

Il tramonto – selected comparison:

Seefried, Lucerne Fest Stgs, Baumgartner



(9/60⁸, 9/15) (ELOQ) ELQ480 7227

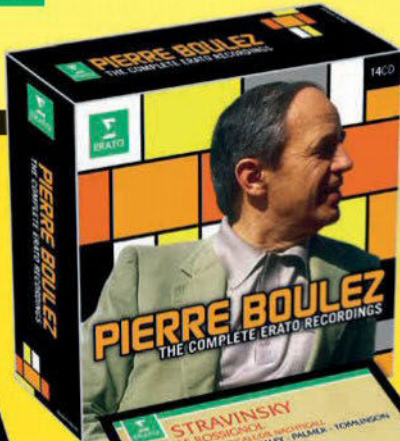
PIERRE BOULEZ




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Rihm

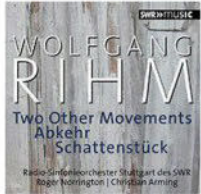
Abkehr^a. Schattenstück^a.

Two Other Movements^b

SWR Radio Symphony Orchestra, Stuttgart /

^aChristian Arming, ^bSir Roger Norrington

Hänssler Classic © SWR19001CD (65' • DDD)



This latest addition to Southwest Radio's survey of Wolfgang Rihm's orchestral

music offers the chance to compare *Two Other Movements*, a substantial work from 2004, with a pair of no less gripping compositions from 30 years earlier.

The seven sections of *Schattenstück* (1982-84) combine to offer a single 'shadow piece', subtitled 'tone-painting for orchestra'. Instrumental shades of dark density, and sustained textures involving shadowings as echos and repetitions, result naturally from a musical style that uneasily evokes the mid-century German mainstream of Karl Amadeus Hartmann and, especially, Bernd Alois Zimmermann. In both *Schattenstück* and *Abkehr* (1985) the challenges to continuity that are Rihm's own speciality seed into a melodramatic ferocity that sometimes disrupts but ultimately enhances the music's prevailing spirit of brooding reflection. And this well-sustained confrontation between fracturing and integrating impulses emerges with even greater distinctiveness 30 years later in *Two Other Movements*.

The English title might simply be a friendly gesture to the New York Philharmonic, who commissioned it; but Rihm also used the occasion to give his relish for allusive orchestral tone-painting a vividly 'other', American cast. In one sense, disproportion is all – at little more than nine minutes, the second movement is barely a third the length of the first; and while the first movement can be thought of as Rihm's idiosyncratic take on the New York City of Charles Ives, complete with sprightly brass bands, the second affirms its otherness, transforming the first's specific sense of place into something more abstract and even more intense.

These radio recordings don't offer high degrees of sonic refinement, but the performances have a telling blend of rawness and concentration. The result is an ear-opening demonstration of the remarkable Rihm phenomenon. **Arnold Whittall**

Różycki

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 67'

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 43; No 2.

Ballade, Op 18

Jonathan Plowright *pf* BBC Scottish

Symphony Orchestra / Łukasz Borowicz

Hyperion © CDA68066 (63' • DDD)



The first thing to say (because it is the first thing you will notice when you play this

disc) is that this is an outstanding recording of a piano and orchestra. The soloist is ideally placed in the sound picture, with the City Halls in Glasgow providing a clean, crisp acoustic allowing every detail to emerge with character and clarity. Hats off to David Hinitt (engineer) and Jeremy Hayes (producer). Even more impressive is the partnership between soloist and conductor. For the second time in this series, Jonathan Plowright and Łukasz Borowicz are like alchemists in the way they can raise first-class second-rate music to another level, a couple of fiercely combative squash players at times, two firm friends reminiscing on a long country walk at others. Borowicz's control of his Scottish players is quite masterly, and Plowright should be paid in bags of gold to reveal how he produces such a rich, singing tone throughout the enormous dynamic range he conjures up, from thunderous roar to mere whisper.

As to Vol 67 itself, I have now listened to it straight through several times with increasing enjoyment. I do think this is one of the more worthwhile discoveries of Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series, certainly up there with the Stojowski concertos, for instance (Vol 28, 6/02), which, as it happens, also features Plowright.

Ludomir Różycki (1883-1953), little known outside his native Poland where he spent most of his career, was a pupil of Zygmunt Noskowski and Engelbert Humperdinck. All three works – the Ballade (1906) and the Piano Concertos Nos 1 (1918) and 2 (c1943) – have dangerously highly calorific helpings of gorgeously spun Romantic themes set against a richly orchestrated backdrop and pages of bravura piano-writing, in short epitomising what most of us think of as a Romantic piano concerto. Among many memorable highlights are the Ballade (10'35") with its apt but unexpected ending, the first movement of the Second Concerto (written in war-torn Poland) and its defiant, life-affirming finale. Reassuring, as comfortable as Sunday night on the telly – only a hair-shirt cynic could fail to enjoy Różycki.

Jeremy Nicholas

Saint-Saëns

'Complete Violin Concertos'

Violin Concertos – No 1, Op 20;

No 2, Op 58; No 3, Op 61

Andrew Wan *vn*

Montreal Symphony Orchestra / Kent Nagano

Analekta © AN2 8770 (74' • DDD)

Recorded live at Maison Symphonique, Montreal, November 26, 27 & 29, 2014



Some of Saint-Saëns's finest works are for the violin. One violinist in particular

was the inspiration and beneficiary of these: Pablo de Sarasate, for whom Saint-Saëns wrote his *Introduction and Rondo capriccioso* and the Violin Concertos Nos 1 and 3. Like the piano concertos of Beethoven and Chopin, Saint-Saëns's Second Violin Concerto was written before the First but published after it.

All three do not come up that often on a single disc and in sequence. They have never, as far as I know, been recorded live as they are here – assembled from performances over three days in the Maison Symphonique de Montréal. If Andrew Wan's accounts are not at the very top of the tree, they are certainly jolly close to it. For those who have not encountered Wan before, he was appointed Concertmaster of the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal in 2008 (two years after Kent Nagano took over as music director) but has a flourishing parallel career as a soloist and chamber musician. His sweet, even tone and unshowy brilliance put me in mind of his fellow Canadian James Ehnes, while the long-standing working relationship of soloist and conductor makes for a happy partnership in the ebb and flow of these graceful works (especially true of the less familiar and underrated First and Second Concertos).

Of recent versions, Wan's strongest rivals are the talented Fanny Clamagirand with the Sinfonia Finlandia Jyväskylä under Patrick Gallois. The sound picture is better focused on the Analekta disc and the Finnish players do not have the finesse of the Canadians (compare the rapt final pages of the Third Concerto's second movement), but Clamagirand's spirited attack and complete empathy with Saint-Saëns's idiom make her accounts, in my view, preferable even to Philippe Graffin's highly praised versions (Hyperion, 10/99). My one reservation about Wan/Nagano is the finale of No 3, which never quite generates the same excitement or, in its soaring second subject, ecstatic intensity as



Alondra de la Parra and the Tonkünstler Orchestra offer works by Enjott Schneider on Wergo

Louis Kaufman in 1945 with the Santa Monica Symphony and Jacques Rachmilovich (Biddulph).

Jeremy Nicholas

Selected comparison:

Clamagrand, Sinf Finlandia, Gallois (NAXO) 8 572037

Schneider

Symphony No 7, 'Dark World'. Autumn Milk.

The Expulsion. Sounds of Nature

Tonkünstler Orchestra / Alondra de la Parra

Wergo © WER5112-2 (59' • DDD)



Born in 1950, Enjott Schneider taught for many years at Munich's University

of Music and Performing Arts. His sizeable output includes eight operas, oratorios, organ concertos and symphonies, and some 600 scores for film and television (he wrote the music for Joseph Vilsmaier's uncompromising 1993 movie *Stalingrad*). Certainly, the two gratefully lyrical and mellifluous miniature suites featured here – *Herbstmilch* and *Die Flucht* from 1988 and 2007 respectively – show him to be a dab hand at broad brushstrokes and recreating the sounds of nature.

Mention of the latter brings us to *Naturklänge* for strings and tape: written in 2012 and subtitled 'Hommage à Sergiu Celibidache', it's a moody tone-painting incorporating sounds both electronic and natural as well as excerpts from the Romanian maestro's spellbinding Munich PO recordings of Debussy's *La mer* ('De l'aube à midi sur la mer') and *Ibéria* ('Les parfums de la nuit') – all skilfully woven into the orchestral canvas by the Munich-based sound designer Friedrich M Dosch. Alas, to my ears at any rate, it's an uncomfortably pallid essay, though I am at least thankful that, after an initial hearing, it prompted me to immerse myself all over again in Celi's magical interpretations!

Sad to relate, I was similarly underwhelmed by Schneider's ambitious Seventh Symphony (2012). Inspired by the spectacular landscape, myths and caverns of the Untersberg in the Bavarian Alps, it serves up an eclectic, disappointingly derivative mix (Mahler, Holst's *The Planets*, John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith, Hans Zimmer). The composer writes of 'a cinematic sound dramaturgy...the orchestra expanded by electronic enhancement', but it's still a pretty thin musical brew. Who knows, perhaps the symphony left an

altogether more enduring impact on those who attended its 2013 premiere at the foot of the Untersberg itself.

If all this sounds like your cup of tea, then rest assured I cannot find fault with either the performances or engineering. For my own part, however, I fear that this is not a CD to which I can imagine myself returning any time soon. **Andrew Achenbach**

Schubert

Symphonies - No 1, D82;

No 3, D200; No 4, 'Tragic', D417

Royal Flemish Philharmonic Orchestra /

Philippe Herreweghe

PHI © ② LPH019 (92' • DDD)



Philippe Herreweghe's previous excursions on disc with Schubert's symphonies were the Ninth in 2011 and the Sixth and Eighth in 2013 (both Pentatone). Now, on his own label, he goes back to the beginning of the Austrian's symphonic career to continue the series.

Herreweghe's soft-grained Schumann was much enjoyed in the *Gramophone* office (Harmonia Mundi, 6/07). The change in



Markus Poschner conducts Richard Strauss with the Orchestra della Svizzera italiana on his debut disc for CPO

orchestra, however, gives a brighter outlook on these earlier works, and the generous acoustic clarifies lines and voices. Schubert was no child prodigy in the Mozart or Mendelssohn mould but the First and Third Symphonies are adolescent works, composed by a lad of 16 and 18 respectively. Nevertheless, they already show his command of structure and orchestration, and hint at some of the harmonic audacities of his maturity. Herreweghe accordingly takes a vivacious approach to them, with pleasingly characterful woodwind solos.

The Third was for a long time a party piece of Beecham's, and his 1958 RPO recording was long available as an EMI Great Recording of the Century. Perhaps no one will ever recreate Beecham's charisma in this music – but perhaps no one should ever try. Today's greater fidelity to the score means that the perky clarinet motif at the outset of the *Allegro con brio* is played *pianissimo* as written, rather than with the look-at-me bounce of Beecham's clarinetist.

Herreweghe's use of hard timp sticks at the opening of the Fourth underlines its kinship with the Representation of Chaos from Haydn's *The Creation*, although it sounds as if he reverts to soft sticks later on. He captures well the ticking energy of

the main *Allegro vivace*, even if, in the finale, he doesn't quite catch the hysterical intensity (or detail) distilled by, say, Harnoncourt in Berlin (Berliner Philharmoniker, 8/15).

Those who have been waiting for Herreweghe to return to Schubert (or who are attracted by this particular coupling) need not hesitate. Others may prefer Harnoncourt's Concertgebouw cycle on four discs at super-budget price (Warner) or Abbado's with the COE, now available in numerous configurations (DG).

David Threasher

Sibelius

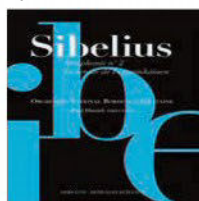
Symphony No 2, Op 43.

Lemminkäinen's Return, Op 22 No 4

Bordeaux Aquitaine National Orchestra / Paul Daniel

ONBA Live/Actes Sud Musicales © ASM25 (52' • DDD)

Recorded live at L'Auditorium de Bordeaux, April 16 & 17, 2015



Regional French orchestras might have as much pedigree recording Sibelius as

the Finns do making wine, but there aren't any obvious struggles with the idiom on display in these live recordings.

'Lemminkäinen's Return' journeys along nicely like a forest animal keeping its head low for safety; all the detail is there and the orchestral picture is sharp (in a textural sense – the tambourine cuts through deliciously), even if some of those shape-shifting passages at the apex lack the last ounce of agility.

Coupled with that atmospheric performance of a slice of Lemminkäinen (all seven minutes of it: couldn't we have heard something more?) is a decent but less remarkable performance of the Second Symphony. Here, Paul Daniel sees the wood rather than the trees, overseeing a performance with admirable sweep and breadth. He caresses the string waves that open the piece but doesn't quite offer the same shape or clarity of articulation to the big tune that prefaces its coda.

Elsewhere, it's little details like that which niggle. There's not enough purpose to those folding-outward *pizzicatos* in the first movement; the low strings can lack clarity in the second; and frequently we don't hear the richness of texture offered by the likes of the BBC Philharmonic under John Storgårds (to compare a

regional French orchestra with a regional British one). The orchestra doesn't throb underneath that big tune, the woodwinds can sound bland and there's some uneasy balance. Cheers greet the end of the symphony and, I'm sure, with good reason – clearly a performance that had a greater impact in the concert hall. A long, beautifully illustrated essay adorns the hardback book but, in common with all the other text, it's only in French. **Andrew Mellor**

Symphony No 2 – selected comparison:

BBC PO, Storgårds (6/14) (CHAN) CHAN10809

R Strauss

Le bourgeois gentilhomme, Op 60^a.

Duett-Concertino^b. *Allerseelen*, Op 10 No 8^c. *Ich*

trage meine Minne, Op 32 No 1^c. *Morgen*, Op 27

No 4^c. *Das Rosenband*, Op 36 No 1^c

^c**Annette Brun** sop ^b**Corrado Giuffredi** cl

^b**Alberto Bianco** bn **Svizzera Italiana Orchestra** /

^{ab}**Markus Poschner**, ^c**Richard Strauss**

CPO © CPO777 990-2 (72) • DDD • T/I

^cRecorded live 1947



This disc is part showcase, part demonstration of the Orchestra della Svizzera

Italiana's own links with Richard Strauss. Five bonus tracks include Strauss himself conducting four of his orchestral songs with the band in 1947 – in a concert that also, incidentally, featured the *Bougeois gentilhomme* Suite – preceded by the grandiloquent pre-concert speech given by Bernhard Paumgartner on the occasion. The songs, not previously released (as far as I'm aware), are fascinating, and the only available recording (again, as far as I'm aware) of the composer conducting his songs with a soprano. His tempi, perhaps surprisingly, are very much what we'd expect from performances today, while Annette Brun's straightforward delivery matches Strauss's own no-nonsense, but nonetheless affecting approach.

The late *Duett-Concertino* was also composed for the OSI, and premiered by them a year later. Here it receives a performance of the right urbane, easy-going mellowness, with Corrado Giuffredi mellifluous and Alberto Bianco garrulous respectively. The beautiful brief *Andante* is particularly fine, even if the players can't quite dispel the suspicion that the Rondo rambles a little.

The *Bürger als Edelmann* Suite, from three decades earlier, is arguably one of the key works – along with the associated *Ariadne auf Naxos* – to point towards Strauss's late

neo-classicism. It and the *Duett-Concertino* make an appealing coupling, as Paavo Järvi showed on his pairing of them with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie on Pentatone. Poschner and his chamber forces offer plenty of fluid virtuosity here, too, with tempi feeling relaxed, even if they're not actually slow (in contrast to the more pointed, sharp-focused approach from Järvi). There's some beautifully sensitive playing in the two Lully-inspired numbers, plenty of humour throughout the 'dinner'. Ultimately, though, both here and in the *Duett-Concertino* I think the OSI are pipped to the post in terms of warmth and wry wit by Kempe's Staatskapelle Dresden, though this is a most enjoyable disc, which serves as an interesting complement to Järvi's.

It's nicely engineered, too, even if the recording level between the first and second work is different. CPO's booklet essay is an interesting read, but it is hampered – as alas so often with this label – by poor, potentially misleading translation: 'unpolitisch' does not, for example, translate as 'impolitic'.

Hugo Shirley

Le bourgeois gentilhomme, *Duett-Concertino* –

selected comparisons:

Staatskapelle Dresden, Kempe (12/92⁸) (WARN) 431780-2

Deutsche Kammerphilb Bremen, P Järvi

(11/04) (PENT) PTC5186 060

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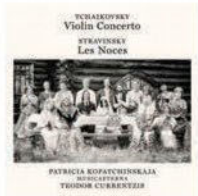
Stravinsky *Les noces*

Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, Op 35^a

^aPatricia Kopatchinskaja *vn*

MusicAeterna / Teodor Currentzis

Sony Classical © 88875 16512-2 (57' • DDD)



Marrying Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto with *Les noces* makes for a

bizarre mismatch. Teodor Currentzis and his Perm orchestra MusicAeterna are on pungent form in the Stravinsky, a worthy successor to their terrific recent *Rite of Spring* (11/15). Indeed, it would have made a more sensible coupling there, as Sony issued *The Rite* all by itself. Rhythms are accented with punch and there's a feel of Old Russia about the way the chorus intones the toasts of the final wedding tableaux. In this version for four pianos and percussion, the singers include the excellent Nadine Koutcher, winner of the 2014 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World. No texts are provided, alas, for this wedding breakfast.

Take a closer look at the black and white wedding photo which adorns the cover, however, and you spy Currentzis and Patricia Kopatchinskaja as the happy couple. Kopatchinskaja is the soloist for Tchaikovsky's concerto and the booklet features a pair of quirky billets-doux between them in which they expound their musical philosophies and, in particular, her route into 'understanding' a concerto that had often felt alien to her.

I'm a huge admirer of Kopatchinskaja and Currentzis as risk-takers. Inevitably, there are going to be times when those risks don't come off. Alas, this is one of those occasions. First violins immediately signal what's in store – stealing in very softly, with crotchets played like quavers, giving a clipped, businesslike statement. Kopatchinskaja's opening phrase doesn't swell to a *forte* and the theme is whispered on the lightest bow-hair. Yes, Tchaikovsky asks for *piano* playing, but he also asks for *dolce*, and sweetness is definitely missing from this glassy, scratchy introduction. At best, it could be described as skittish.

Every time things pick up – fireworks erupt when Kopatchinskaja hits her stride at 4'47" – something else comes along to dampen any mounting enthusiasm. She daintily tiptoes over the score when a *mezzo-forte* is called for and the cadenza contains much *sul ponticello* playing and chirruping high quavers, more Bartók than Tchaikovsky.

Lovely woodwind-playing opens the Canzonetta. Kopatchinskaja plays *con sordino*, but it is far too quiet, more akin to crooning. She tests the bounds of audibility in her dialogue with the clarinet and oboe in the finale (tr 3, 2'40") and drags back the tempo. Swollen notes and slurs in the solo line give the impression of a drunken Cossack, although Currentzis draws steely *pizzicatos* and stamps from his strings to really make this movement dance.

In short, this amounts to a total rethinking of Tchaikovsky's concerto and you may well find it more to your taste than mine. If you are able to sample this disc, the first two minutes will tell you all you need to know. **Mark Pullinger**

Tchaikovsky

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 23; No 2, Op 44

Mélotie Zhao *pf*

Suisse Romande Orchestra / Michail Jurowski

Claves © 50-1603 (78' • DDD)



The unusual trajectory of Mélotie Zhao's recording career began with a set of Chopin Etudes, recorded when she was 13, and has progressed through Liszt's *Transcendental Etudes* and a complete set of Beethoven sonatas. Now, at 21, Zhao has made her first recording with orchestra, the august Orchestre de la Suisse Romande under Michail Jurowski, in the first two Tchaikovsky concertos.

It should be said up front that the Suisse Romande sound magnificent, their historical affinity for Russian scores heightened under Jurowski's adept leadership. In the G major Second Concerto, given here without Siloti's cuts, concertmaster Bogdan Zvoristeanu and principal cellist François Guye create magic in the slow movement, a veritable piano trio *en concertante*. The woodwinds are superb throughout.

Zhao has a keen rhythmic sense and lacks neither speed nor power. One wishes, however, that her power were slightly more calibrated. Her sound is healthy but the default dynamic setting seems somewhere between a *forte* and a triple *forte*. Quiet passages are few and far between, seldom sustained and rarely tender. The wonder is how Zhao is able to maintain her stentorian delivery even against the orchestra's most delicate *pianissimo* string *pizzicatos*. So uniform and unyielding a dynamic palette has implications for the shaping of phrases, with which Zhao is not much concerned in any case. Interestingly, the movements that

seem to suffer most are the dance finales, which seem aggressive, punched and mindless. Overall, bereft of finesse, nuance, flexibility and recognisable lyricism, both concertos come off as strangely faceless and impersonal. Artistic performances of these concertos are plentiful and choices of favourites personal; unfortunately this disc is not in the running.

Patrick Rucker

Tchaikovsky

Swan Lake (concert suite, arr K Järvi)

Gstaad Festival Orchestra / Kristjan Järvi

Sony Classical © 88875 18747-2 (68' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Liederhalle Beethoven-Saal, Stuttgart, October 4, 2015.



'Tchaikovsky *Swan Lake*', declares the booklet cover to this Sony CD. *Caveat*

emptor. What you get is a concert suite. Not the usual concert suite (usually demarcated as Op 20a) but Kristjan Järvi's own pick'n'mix selection of numbers from the ballet – 68 minutes of swannery in lively performances by the Gstaad Festival Orchestra. But this is neither fish nor fowl. Who is this disc aimed at? Who would want this much of Tchaikovsky's score without opting for the complete ballet instead?

The GFO comprises members from Swiss orchestras forming what the booklet hails as a 'national team'. Järvi sets bracing tempi and his band play well, barring a few sloppy transitions. Most of the favourite numbers are there – the famous oboe *scène*, the Waltz, the 'Dances des cygnes' – although the narrative is muddled by plonking the coda from the Act 1 *pas de deux* (commonly shunted into Act 3 as the 'Black Swan' *pas de deux*) into Act 2. Gstaad leader Vlad Stănculeasa gets the opportunity to shine with several solos, including the 'Danse russe', which may be a rarity in performance but is on at least seven complete recordings I could name, including that of Järvi Snr (Chandos, 3/14), where it is stylishly dashed off by James Ehnes.

The recording comes from a concert performance in Stuttgart in a lively acoustic, strong bass drum and tam-tam contributing to a noisy finale until it peters out into thin string tone and an odd repeat. Punctuated by applause and laughter at what I assume to be conductor antics, it's not for repeated listening pleasure. Perhaps you had to be there.

Mark Pullinger



In his element: Jordi Savall conducts Le Concert des Nations

Vasks

'Presence'

Cello Concerto No 2, 'Klātbūtne/Presence'^a.

Musique du soir^b. Grāmata čellam

Sol Gabetta vc^c Irène Timacheff-Gabetta org

^aAmsterdam Sinfonietta / Candida Thompson

Sony Classical © 88725 42312-2 (61' • DDD)



The Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks (who turns 70 this April) first encountered the Argentinian cellist Sol Gabetta when he accepted an invitation to attend her annual chamber music festival in Switzerland (where she now resides). Fascinated by Vasks's music ever since she heard his 1978 piece for solo cello *Grāmata čellam* at the age of 18, the persistent Gabetta eventually persuaded the initially reluctant composer to write her a concerto (his second for the instrument).

Luminously scored for cello with string orchestra and lasting around 35 minutes, it bears the title of *Presence* – and here let me quote from Vasks's own descriptive notes – 'by which I mean that I am here. I am not distant. With every breath I am

here in this world, with all my ideals and dreams of a better world.' He also explains how the work 'is dominated by a mood that suggests the soul ascending into the cosmos. I was then inspired to conjure up the idea of the soul returning to earth and starting a new life. And then I had the idea of giving musical expression to this new beginning in life in the form of a lullaby.' I won't spoil the surprise, but it's an ear-pricking device he also employs in the rapt second part of *Grāmata čellam* (the final item on the disc). The concerto is cast in three movements (adopting Vasks's favoured slow-fast-slow scheme) and couched, for the most part, in a fearlessly diatonic idiom. Envious concentration goes hand in hand with a strength, purity and serenity that held me from start to finish. Indeed, at its contemplative best, *Presence* has something of the timeless radiance, compassion and humanity of, say, Vaughan Williams or Finzi. Needless to report, it receives blisteringly dedicated and stunningly coordinated advocacy by the same artists responsible for the October 2012 premiere.

If I am rather less persuaded by *Musique du soir* for cello and organ (in which Gabetta is accompanied by her mother,

Irène Timacheff-Gabetta), the release as a whole, boasting superlative production values throughout, can still be confidently recommended to Vasks's many fans and newcomers alike.

Andrew Achenbach

'Les éléments'

'Tempêtes, orages et fêtes marines'

Locke Music for The Tempest Marais

Alcyone – Airs pour les Matelots et les Tritons

Rameau Les Boréades – Contredanse très

vive. Hippolyte et Aricie – Tonnerre. Les

Indes galantes – Air pour les Zéphirs; Orage

et air pour Borée. Zoroastre – Contredanse

Rebel Les éléments Telemann Overture

(Suite), 'Hamburger Ebb und Fluth'

('Wassermusik'), TWV55:C3 Vivaldi

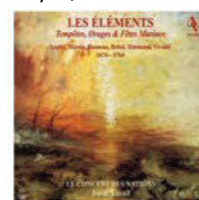
Flute Concerto, 'La tempesta di mare',

Op 10 No 1 RV433

Le Concert des Nations / Jordi Savall

Alia Vox © 2 AVSA9914 (99' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at Fontfroide Abbey, Narbonne, July 19, 2015



They hadn't heard of global warming in the time of Rebel, Marais and

An inspiring new Easter Oratorio by Christopher Wood

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ABBAY ROAD STUDIOS

Holy Week



DENNIS O'NEILL

SOLOISTS:

DENNIS O'NEILL CBE

GARETH BRYNMOR JOHN

(KATHLEEN FERRIER AWARD WINNER 2013)

REBECCA BOTTONE

(ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, ENO)

CLARE MCCALDIN

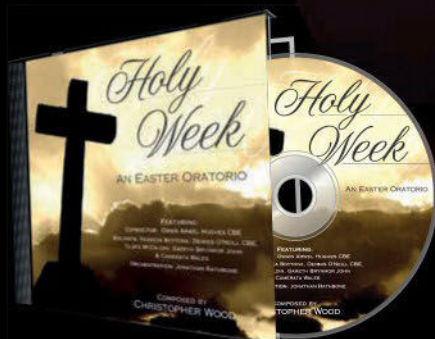
(ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, WNO)

“Wood clearly has a great melodic talent...”

PLANET HUGILL

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and wonderful melodies. A joy to conduct
and captivating to listen to...”*

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Rameau, and to come across this two-disc set of floods, storms and gales in the soggy last days of 2015, and then read Jordi Savall's booklet-note call to respect the planet, is apt to summon sobering reflections. Not so the music itself, however, which, if in itself unlikely to change the climate, is as invigorating as a walk on a windy day. Recorded live in Fontfroide Abbey in Narbonne at a concert entitled 'Terra nostra: Homage to the Earth', it offers 'marine festivals' alongside the tempests and is for the most part rather jolly and tuneful.

Most of the music has origins in the theatre, where in Baroque times storms could be potent plot-worriers. Thus we have a short suite from Marais's opera *Alcyone*, in which a 'tempête' sits among music for lusty matelots and a chaconne for tritons; another short suite drawn from four Rameau operas in which Boreas blows but all ends in a contredanse; Matthew Locke's fascinatingly angular and melodically unpredictable music for a 1674 production of *The Tempest* in which, despite the evocatively gathered squall of its innocuously titled 'Curtain Tune', the final number is a strictly ordered canon; and Rebel's ballet *Les éléments*, with its sensational opening seven-note crunch-chord of chaos. Away from the stage, there is Vivaldi's well-known *Tempesta di mare* flute concerto (played here on recorder), and Telemann's delicious and fluidly playful *Hamburger Ebb und Fluth* suite – if only today's flood defences could work as serenely as the Hamburg sluices apparently depicted in this work's gigue movement!

Jordi Savall directs with typical grandeur and depth of tone. The subject-matter means plenty of work for the two-man wind machine and rumbling drum department, but there is exquisite contrast too in, say, the fluty stillness of Marais's *Ritournelle* or the exquisitely graceful 'sleeping Thetis' *Sarabande* of the Telemann. Not everything about a live concert always transfers well to disc. The Vivaldi concerto comes across as stodgy, and the ample acoustic provokes the kind of ensemble problems in the Telemann overture that one imagines would not have survived a studio recording. There are noises too (some, I fancy, coming from the conductor), but the enthusiastic audience participation in the encore – a Rameau contredanse – leaves one in no doubt that a good time was had by all. Whatever was on their minds by then, it wasn't rising water levels.

Lindsay Kemp

'Island Songs'

Dean The Siduri Dances^a Edwards Saxophone Concerto, 'Full Moon Dances'^b Sculthorpe Island Songs^a

Amy Dickson *saxes*

Sydney Symphony Orchestra /

^bMiguel Harth-Bedoya, ^aBenjamin Northey

Sony Classical © 88875 16906-2 (60' • DDD)



Sydney-born, London-based classical saxophonist Amy

Dickson's latest release is a terrific musical tribute to her home country, comprising premiere recordings of three attractive, contrasting works for saxophone and orchestra by Australian composers.

Peter Sculthorpe's haunting *Island Songs* and Ross Edwards's vibrant, evocative *Full Moon Dances* were written for Dickson; Brett Dean's violently ecstatic *The Siduri Dances* was originally scored for flute and strings but arranged for soprano saxophone with Dickson's involvement. What binds all three is a narrative if not strictly programmatic quality; this in turn allows Dickson to exploit her abilities as an instrumentalist-storyteller.

Scored for solo soprano and alto saxophones with the accompaniment of strings and percussion, Sculthorpe's late elegiac masterpiece rings with thunder and birdsong as Dickson's burnished chant celebrates and mourns in equal measure. Although introduced by hesitant, muted strings, Dean's *The Siduri Dances* (a reference to the hedonistic goddess of the epic *Gilgamesh*) by contrast palpitates with a frenzied elation and violent energy that Dickson seems gleefully to relish.

Edwards's richly scored *Full Moon Dances* for alto saxophone and orchestra combines elegy and elation, its five movements bringing together birdsong, chant and other sound features from different cultures. Here, Dickson is the Moon Goddess incarnate, as full of abandon in the brilliant 'First Ritual Dance' as she is serene and inscrutable in 'Water-Moon', a homage to the Chinese goddess of compassion. The Sydney Symphony Orchestra, whether under Benjamin Northey in the first two works or under Miguel Harth-Bedoya in the third, play with all the energy and precision for which they have become world-renowned.

William Yeoman

IN THE STUDIO

An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

• BIS plans

Yevgeny Sudbin has recorded Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 1 with the **Tapiola Sinfonietta** under **Osmo Vänskä**, which is due for release (with Piano Concerto No 2, recorded with the same forces in 2014) towards the end of the year. There'll be more Beethoven from the **Sitkovetsky Trio**, who recorded the Trios Op 70 No 2 and Op 1 No 3 in Bristol shortly after Christmas. January saw **Masaaki Suzuki** record a second volume of Bach organ works (the first was *Gramophone's* Recording of the Month in October 2015), this time at the Kobe Shoin Chapel, Japan.

• The Naxos Ring continues

The budget label will be at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Concert Hall to record the second instalment of the **Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra's** *Ring* cycle in late January. The cast for *Die Walküre* is headed by **Stuart Skelton** and **Heidi Melton** as Siegmund and Sieglinde, and **Petra Lang** as Brünnhilde. The German bass-baritone **Matthias Goerne** returns as Wotan, as do **Michelle DeYoung** (Fricka) and conductor Jaap van Zweden (pictured). *Die Walküre* is set to be released in the autumn.



• More Chandos Copland

John Wilson has recorded a second volume of Copland for Chandos in Salford with the **BBC Philharmonic**. The works featured are the *Organ Symphony*, *Symphony No 2* and the *Symphonic Ode*, and the disc is due for release in September.

• Choral premiere

Violinist **Jennifer Pike** joined the **Chapel Choir of Benenden School** and conductor **Edward Whiting** for a recording of **David Bednall's** *Stabat mater* for upper voices, organ and solo violin, with the composer himself playing the organ. The disc is due out on Regent Records in the summer.

Tchaikovsky: Piano Trio in A minor

Jeremy Nicholas talks to Trio Con Brio Copenhagen about one of the finest of all piano trios

‘**P**ersonally I think it is one of the greatest pieces for this combination because of both the scope and the content.’ So says Jens Elvekjaer, pianist of the Trio Con Brio Copenhagen. Many would agree while admitting the irony of the composer resolutely refusing to write for the genre. ‘Forgive me, dear friend,’ he wrote to his patroness Nadezhda von Meck in November 1880. ‘I would do anything to give you pleasure, but this is beyond me... I simply cannot endure the combination of piano with violin or cello. To my mind the timbre of these instruments will not blend.’ It’s a refusal that’s all the more puzzling because the second movement of the Piano Concerto No 2, completed only a few months earlier, is essentially a piano trio.

The Second Piano Concerto was, significantly, dedicated to Nikolai Rubinstein. Before he could premiere the work – and just four months after Tchaikovsky’s letter to Mme von Meck – Rubinstein died. Despite periods of estrangement, the loss to Tchaikovsky of his teacher, mentor and longtime friend left him bereft. It is against this background that the Piano Trio in A minor, Op 50 was conceived and composed. Completed in January 1882, Tchaikovsky dedicated the work ‘In Memory of a Great Artist’.

The Copenhagen Trio started playing the work in 2004. Since then they reckon to have performed it nearly 100 times. ‘It’s a milestone of the repertoire, one of a kind,’ says Soo-Kyung Hong, the South Korean cellist, wife of Jens Elvekjaer and sister of the Trio’s violinist Soo-Jin Hong. ‘Yes,’ agrees Elvekjaer. ‘And it’s also interesting to see the influence the Tchaikovsky Trio has had on succeeding generations of Russian composers like Rachmaninov and Shostakovich. I think it was the first piano trio to have this form.’

The form is indeed unique: two movements, the first (*Pezzo elegiaco: Moderato assai*) in sonata form, the second (*Tema con variazioni: Andante con moto*) a set of variations (2A) on a folk-like theme (Rubinstein loved genuine folksongs) with the last variation set apart from the rest (*Variazione Finale e Coda: Allegro risoluto e con fuoco*) and



‘It’s like running a marathon’: Trio Con Brio Copenhagen at the Tchaikovsky sessions

cast as a sonata movement of its own (2B). Explains Elvekjaer: ‘You have the first part of the second movement [2A] in the dominant key and the last part [2B] in the tonic of A minor. So you have, in a simple way, that tension between the tonic and dominant ... it just takes 50 minutes! If you are able to convey this tension then you don’t have the feeling as a player or listener that it is so long. You feel a connection from the first note to the last as though it’s in one movement. That’s something that develops over time when you perform it. You have this journey and, by the end, you feel that somehow you have arrived.’

I ask Elvekjaer what the biggest challenges are in playing what is arguably Tchaikovsky’s most demanding score in terms of technique and stamina. ‘Ninety pages is a lot!’ the Danish pianist agrees. ‘In the first movement, the piano is playing continuously and a lot of the time the writing is quite tricky but – and this is something that comes with a lot of performances – you eventually feel more on top of it and you learn how to “plan your powers”! But it’s not just demanding in the virtuosic sense because in the variations movement it’s a fascinating challenge to realise the colouration that Tchaikovsky asks for.’

The historical view



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Letter to Nadezhda von Meck
(January 25, 1882)

‘I can say with some conviction that my work is not all bad...but I fear I may have arranged music of a symphonic character as a trio, instead of writing directly for the instruments.’

George Bernard Shaw
The Farnham, Haslemere and Hindhead
Herald (December 17, 1898)

‘Tchaikovsky’s Piano Trio in A minor exhibits all the qualities which have made its composer so popular now that he is dead, and we have had plenty of time to think about it.’

Eduard Hanslick
Am Ende des Jahrhunderts, Berlin (1899)
after the Vienna premiere of the Trio

‘When the trio was played for the first time, the faces of the listeners expressed the wish it should be the last. It belongs to the category of suicidal compositions, which kill themselves by their merciless length.’

Soo-Kyung chips in: 'As a cellist I can say that in this piece and the Ravel Trio – which we also play a lot – it's the balance that's really tricky. The writing is so symphonic in places. The beginning, for example, is no problem because of the register – it's just piano and cello – but there are many places where the cello just doesn't get heard, where it needs to be extremely concentrated and focused. There are some concert halls where, because of the acoustic, the violinist goes out front to listen to how much output I should give.'

This is the cue for her sister Soo-Jin to join the conversation. 'For the start of the piece I'm often the one who goes out to listen, and then we switch round. This makes a lot of sense because we trust each others' ears. But you ask about the difficulty of each part. Well, the violin part is not like the Violin Concerto but there are similar places which are very tricky. The most demanding part is to find the right colour and sound for each theme. For instance, the opening theme of the *Pezzo elegiaco* mustn't be too intense so that there is a contrast when it returns at the end of the second movement. If it's too heavy, it can get very tiring for the players and the listeners. We try and plan the journey from the very first note.'

'The funeral march is heard over the cello and then, for the violin entry, he has written "crying". You can't just play this page straight off' – Soo-Kyung Hong

Many trios decide to make the cuts sanctioned by Tchaikovsky in the second movement. Some, though not the Copenhagen Trio, omit the Fugue (Var 8). Most common is the cut of 136 bars in the *Variazione Finale e Coda* just eight bars from the top (0'16" – pages 67 to 78 in the Peters Edition used here or pages 86 to 100 in the Jurgenson Edition). 'It's basically a repeat of the same material,' says Jens Elvekjaer. 'For instance, the octave theme on the piano (page 70) in E major returns on page 80, 14 bars before fig H. The movement all but starts again on page 77. We feel that at this point in the performance with nothing new happening – and I know there are people who believe we've sinned! – I don't see that you gain a lot from playing it twice. The second movement is so rich in material that to abbreviate the finale, to return to the concluding A minor section sooner, makes it much stronger. The key point is on page 84 when you finally break off from the major key in the second bar (marked *ff legato*) and go into the grief-stricken final pages.'

As Soo-Kyung observes 'The funeral march is heard [page 91, *Lugubre*] over the cello and then, for the violin entry, Tchaikovsky has written *piangendo* – "crying". You can't just come in and play this last page straight off. When we recorded it, we first did two complete play-throughs of the entire last movement and we ended up using the ending from one of these complete takes.'

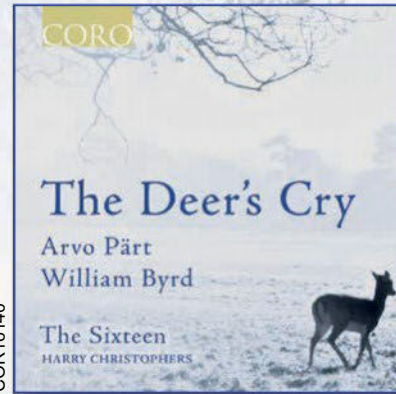
'Yes,' her sister confirms. 'Whenever we play the last bit people say afterwards, "How can you still stand?" It's like running a marathon. It does demand great stamina but no matter how tired you are by the end, you still have to give 200 per cent of yourself.'

► To read Gramophone's review of Trio Con Brio' Copenhagen's Tchaikovsky Trio in A minor, Op 50, turn to page 52

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Chamber



Pwyll ap Siôn listens to the Carducci Quartet's new Glass disc:

'The Fifth Quartet's clear formal outline and sense of organic growth make it Glass's most 'classical' quartet' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 49**



Hannah Nepil on the Trio Con Brio's Smetana and Tchaikovsky

'Their hallmarks are vitality and an ability to let in every chink of light, both of which serve them well' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 52**

Bartók

'The Works for Violin and Piano'

Violin Sonatas - No 1, Op 21 Sz75; No. 2, Sz76; E minor. Solo Violin Sonata, Sz117. Rhapsodies - No 1, Sz86; No 2, Sz89. Andante. Romanian Folk Dances, Sz56 (arr Székely). Piano Sonata, Sz80
Tanja Becker-Bender *vn* **Péter Nagy** *pf*
SWR Music © 2 SWR19003CD (147' • DDD)



A very useful double-pack, this, which, although not always absolutely top-of-the-

league performance-wise, is certainly good enough to convey the essence of some great 20th-century chamber music. The earliest works included are the rarely heard Andante in A major for violin and piano (1902) and, rather more familiar (at least since André Gertler recorded it for Supraphon), the Straussian E minor Violin Sonata, into whose rhapsodising world Tanja Becker-Bender ushers us with warmth and conviction.

The Sonata opens the second disc and is immediately followed by the wonderful Solo Violin Sonata, written in 1944 for Yehudi Menuhin, who 'tamed' some colouristic microtonal writing in the *Presto* finale, an option that Becker-Bender takes here, whereas Barnabás Kelemen gives us the microtones with no holds barred. Becker-Bender voices the fugue's tiered opening with skill and weaves a world of mystery into the 'Melodia', darkening her tone effectively. Thereafter we have another solo work, but not for violin. Pianist Péter Nagy holds the high musical standard with a memorable performance of the Piano Sonata, so often a vehicle for percussive overkill but which in this context is full of differing grades of tone and colour, especially in the finale.

The first disc offers the two Rhapsodies and the two mature violin sonatas. For the former, in spite of the many virtues paraded by Becker-Bender and Nagy (who excel at the start of the Second Rhapsody), I'd opt for Kelemen and Kocsis performing

the orchestral versions, especially as Kelemen offers different options for single movements of both Rhapsodies. As to the two sonatas coupled together, Becker-Bender's tonal range lacks the grit of, say, Kelemen and Kocsis, Gyorgy Pauk with Jenő Jandó or Isaac Stern in partnership with Alexander Zakin. Also, in the First Sonata, the tempered urbanity of David Oistrakh, either with Frida Bauer or (especially) Sviatoslav Richter, or Gidon Kremer with Martha Argerich make a stronger impression. Although often effective in the way the music is nuanced – Bartók's quieter music frequently comes across as quite magical – I find myself craving rather more in the way of physical abandon, especially in the finale of the First Sonata.

The less acerbic Second Sonata is more convincing, especially the second movement, which Becker-Bender and Nagy treat as a sort of extended *friss* section of a Hungarian Rhapsody (likewise Isabelle Faust with Florent Boffard). It's never less than sympathetic, though, which makes for a safe and valuable recommendation, at least good enough for you to judge whether you wish to proceed further with alternative recordings. **Rob Cowan**

Violin Sonatas, Solo Violin Sonata – selected comparison:

Kelemen (5/13) (HUNG) HSACD32515

Rhapsodies – selected comparison:

Kelemen, Hungarian Nat PO, Kocsis

(10/11) (HUNG) HSACD32509

Brahms • Schubert

'The Complete Duos, Vol 2'

Brahms Cello Sonata No 1, Op 38

Schubert Introduction and Variations on

'Trockne Blumen', D802. Sonatina No 2, D385

Pieter Wispelwey *vc* **Paolo Giacometti** *pf*

Evil Penguin © EPRC0021 (70' • DDD)

Brahms • Haydn • Schubert

Brahms Cello Sonata No 1, Op 38 **Haydn**

Divertimento, after HobXI/113 (arr Piatigorsky)

Schubert Arpeggione Sonata, D821

Stéphane Tétreault *vc* **Marie-Ève Scarfone** *pf*

Analekta © AN2 9994 (66' • DDD)



When Pieter Wispelwey points out that by playing neither the violin, viola, flute or arpeggione he's missing out on no fewer than 14 pieces by Schubert and Brahms, you can't help feeling for him. 'Should I then, really, resist my urge to touch them and turn them into cello pieces?' he asks. Well, he thinks 'no'. So here we are with Vol 2 of the six-part series in which he's doing exactly that, and I'd describe this lovingly produced studio recording as a brave, brilliantly played mixed bag.

The disc's opener is Schubert's *Introduction and Variations on 'Trockne Blumen'*, originally for flute and piano, and it makes for a striking start. Wispelwey's top-register entry with those first despairing four notes hooks you right in, aching and vulnerable of character, with an arresting, visceral tone (incidentally, the top two strings of his 1760 Guadagnini are of uncovered gut). Indeed, as we move through the variations, there's a lot to enjoy. But, returning to those opening bars, Wispelwey can't reproduce the flute's fluidity in the following semiquaver runs, and often it's the case that what the cello brings to the work doesn't quite compensate for the loss of the qualities bestowed on it by the flute. For instance, there's too much obvious effort going into the smooth lines of Var 3, not helped by Wispelwey's highly audible fingerboard action. Then, while it's hats off to him for attempting Var 5's demi-semiquaver sextuplets on the cello at all, even with his indisputable technical skill the unavoidable string-crossings make it impossible to achieve quicksilver cleanliness. The Sonatina in A minor, originally a violin piece, translates more smoothly, containing some lovely moments from pianist Paolo Giacometti, whose crisp, pedal-light textures contribute to the whole's overall effect of heartfelt emotion presented with poise.



The London Bridge Trio with viola player Gary Pomeroy open the door to Dvořák's piano quartets (review page 49)

Brahms's E minor Sonata is the disc's one work actually intended for the cello, and Wispelwey dispatches it with his characteristic conviction and dark-hued strength. However, I couldn't help but compare it with Stéphane Tétreault's version. This, recorded at Quebec's Eglise St-Augustin de Mirabel, has a refreshing absence of fingerboard percussion, which makes a particular difference in the middle movement. Also, whether this is down to Wispelwey's interpretation or how his recording was balanced, Tétreault's sounds more faithful to the score's dynamic markings, meaning that in the first movement we get to appreciate a true *piano* start and an obvious first *forte* in bar 17 (at 0'45"). In fact the whole of Tétreault's disc, which is also two-thirds arrangements but not of the news-grabbing variety, charmed me from the off; from his Haydn Divertimento (originally for the viola da gamba-like baryton), through Schubert's A minor Arpeggione Sonata and on to the Brahms, this is just pure, lyrical, unadulterated playing of the highest order, with a maturity that belies his 22 years, and matched impeccably by his duo partner, Marie-Ève Scarfone. I can't wait to hear more from him. **Charlotte Gardner**

Brahms • Hindemith

Brahms Clarinet Quintet, Op 115

Hindemith Clarinet Quintet

Raphaël Sévère c/ **Pražák Quartet**

Mirare © MIR282 (58' • DDD)

Brahms • Reger

Brahms Clarinet Quintet, Op 115

Reger Clarinet Quintet, Op 146

Sharon Kam c/ **Isabelle van Keulen, Ulrike-Anima**

Mathé vns **Volker Jacobsen** va **Gustav Rivinius** vc

Berlin Classics © 0300643BC (75' • DDD)



The playing of Richard Mühlfeld coaxed Johannes Brahms out of retirement, into a glorious Indian summer yielding such works as the Clarinet Quintet, the Trio and a pair of sonatas that are among the instrument's crown jewels. 'Fräulein Klarinette' and 'my dear nightingale' were among Brahms's nicknames for Mühlfeld and we have contemporary accounts of Mühlfeld's playing in the Quintet as having 'an unusual dynamic range at times, the *fortissimos* being very powerful'. Moreover, 'he did not

endeavour to get all the "limelight" in the Quintet, but obviously considered himself as no greater (or lesser) than the string players'. When star players perform the Quintet, a key test can be how well they blend with the string players and how much personality is permitted to shine through.

In these two new recordings, both clarinetists are on the more deferential side. Raphaël Sévère, with the Pražák Quartet, has very careful phrasing and articulation but tends to play safe with dynamics. The dramatic interlude in the middle of the *Adagio* is full of velvety soft ripples but lacks the rhapsodic Hungarian feel Brahms requires. However, Sévère blends beautifully with the quartet, who possess a mellow, supple string sound. There is a sense of impish fun in the *Andantino* and a charming lilt to the 3/8 variation just before the work's close.

Sharon Kam is richer in tone than Sévère and is joined not by an established quartet but by a line-up of string soloists led by the excellent violinist Isabelle van Keulen. The string-playing has more sinew than the Pražáks but – like Sévère – Kam doesn't dominate the texture. She treads too carefully at the start of the Hungarian section, until allowing a wilder gypsy side to steal in. Neither recording is a match for

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

MODERN MUSIC FROM MEGADISC CLASSICS

Philip Clark welcomes the return of a label devoted to contemporary fare



Boulez supervises the Diotima Quartet recording a revised version of his *Livre pour quatuor*, the pick of a new batch of releases from Megadisc Classics

During the formative days of Megadisc Classics in the early 1990s, the label was associated with erstwhile Soviet bloc composers such as Ustvolskaya and Silvestrov, but the music it now aims to document has broadened exponentially. This latest batch of releases (available through Harold Moores Records in the UK and by email, order@megadisc-classics.com) recalls from the subs benches an almost-classic by **Pierre Boulez** and surveys three Paris-based composers who are dealing with the fallout of Pierre Henry and Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète* revolution.

'Almost', because Boulez's music for string quartet *Livre pour quatuor*, the original version of which dates back to 1949, has never quite achieved the cachet of other totemic Boulez works from that same period – his Second Piano Sonata, *Le visage nuptial* and *Polyphonie X* included. True to form, Boulez would repurpose two movements as the string-orchestral *Livre pour cordes*. But the original 45-minute quartet incarnation, with its sprawling structure and chalky, pasteurised string textures, probably asks for more than it ultimately gives.

I heard the Diotima Quartet play at the 2015 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, where the timbral finesse and

rounded physicality of their performance of Heinz Holliger's String Quartet No 2 left a deep impression. This performance of *Livre pour quatuor* comes imbued with comparable qualities; certainly the Parisii Quartet's 2001 performance (recently reissued on DG's Boulez Complete Works – A/13) feels one-dimensional in comparison – and the Diotima worked with Boulez himself to piece together a definitive edition that is lighter on its feet, and explains the album's subtitle, 'révisé'.

In the booklet-notes, Boulez is quoted confessing that his original concept was so rhythmically chewy that either quartets needed to employ a conductor ('which is absurd') or, from the overload of notated information, work towards adapting the material into something workable. This revised version rationalises rhythms, rethinks tempo and generally gives articulation a reality check, allowing the Diotima a fighting chance of negotiating its maze-like plexus. Listen diligently and certain markers become apparent – a chain of connectivity between sustained sounds and serrated jolts, bowed certainty constantly negated by apocalyptic *pizzicato*, *col legno* and *battuto* bowings.

Naysayers criticise Boulez, especially so these early pieces, for imposing his

compositional agenda on instruments without considering how abstract concepts might operate as sound: the pianist John Tilbury once compared Boulez's two-piano *Structures* to throwing paint at a canvas without ever standing back to look at the results. Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata hovers in the background of Boulez's Second Piano Sonata like the ghost of structures past, and the weight and gravitas of *Livre pour quatuor* summons the spirit of late Beethoven quartets. It's difficult to imagine a more detailed and tautly controlled performance than the Diotima Quartet's.

As Boulez was assembling *Livre pour quatuor*, Pierre Henry and Pierre Schaeffer, in a different Paris arrondissement, were piecing together a diametrically opposed idea of music to Boulez's. Schaeffer and Henry were intrigued with the possibilities of composition based not on 'preconceived sound abstractions, but on sound fragments that exist in reality'. *Musique concrète* captured sounds from the environment, and once they were on tape, these *objets trouvés* could be slowed down, sped up, combined and rapidly intercut in ways that allowed composers to deal with the materiality of sound – recording deployed to penetrate deep inside sound.

Christian Zanési is a one-time Schaeffer pupil and *Paysage électronique avec train* (2006, rev 2014) is classic *musique concrète* thinking. The orgasmic screeching and heavy breathing of trains are part of our everyday experience, so deeply engrained into the functional minutiae of life that no one ever thinks to question the emotional imprint they leave. Trains are about timing and speed. The internal and external momentum of train journeys might be routine, or could lead to a sense of displacement – ideas that are profoundly musical in their implications. Trains also rely on the vibrations of metal grinding into metal, sounds that Zanési transforms into a 15-minute journey of laminar sound, landmarks whistling past our still ears as we approach an unknown destination.

Daniel Teruggi now heads Le Groupe de Recherches Musicales, the research institution founded by Schaeffer. *The Four Seasons* was assembled piecemeal between 1993 and 2013, and drops the listener into a chimera fantasy world where sounds themselves shiver and decay, grow and blossom, rather than being expressed through musical metaphor.

The harpist, composer and improviser **Elisabeth Valletti** worked at Le Groupe de Recherches Musicales in 2012 and her *Sacrum '5* works with the conceit that the harp, broken into its constituent parts electronically, represents sounds that overwhelm the brain during periods of emotional intensity. Four pieces are on offer, featuring various instrumental combinations, sometimes interacting with electronics. But whereas the Zanési disc suggests that harmony is there for the taking – all you need do is look around you – Valletti's pieces feel harmonically contrived and note-picky: that old analogue problem of imposing an agenda on to sound still apparently at play in the digital age. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Boulez Livre pour quatuor (révisé)
Diotima Qt
Megadisc © MDC7796



Zanési Paysage électronique avec train
Christian Zanési
Megadisc © MDC7795



Teruggi The Four Seasons
Daniel Teruggi
Megadisc © MDC7868



Valletti Sacrum '5
Elisabeth Valletti
Megadisc © MDC7794

the likes of Martin Fröst and Andreas Ottensamer, both displaying a wider dynamic range and greater personality.

The couplings on these discs bring rarer fare which may well sway you into a purchase. Max Reger's Quintet is given an expressive performance by Kam & Co, its *Vivace* scherzo skittering along at a delicate *pianissimo*. Van Keulen leads some gorgeous string-playing in the *Largo*, encouraging Kam into her most rhapsodic response on the disc. Like Mozart and Brahms before him, Reger concludes with a set of variations, engagingly done here.

Paul Hindemith's five-movement Clarinet Quintet occupies a different world to that of the Brahms, a more fractured, pungent one. Composed in 1923, it builds on Austrian tradition, even employing an E flat clarinet to shrill a 'Schneller Ländler' third movement typical of village ensembles. The sparseness of the fourth movement seems to anticipate Britten or Shostakovich, while the finale throws everything into confusion, presenting the first movement in reverse! Sévère and the Pražák Quartet give a boisterous performance, which should win the work new friends. **Mark Pullinger**

Brahms – selected comparisons:

Fröst, Jansen, Brovtsyn, Rysanov, Thedéen

(7/14) (BIS) BIS2063

Ottensamer, Kavakos, C & S Koncz, Tamestit

(6/15) (DG) 481 1409DH

Dvořák

Piano Quartets – No 1, Op 23 B53;

No 2, Op 87 B162

London Bridge Trio with **Gary Pomeroy** *va*
Champs Hill © CHRC107 (67 • DDD)



Dvořák's masterly piano quartets find the augmented London Bridge Trio (Gary

Pomeroy takes the viola line) offering sensitive, well-integrated readings with no intrusive mannerisms and consistently sound musical judgement. The E flat Quartet, Op 87, is the 'biggie', a work cast along symphonic lines, its expressive world reminiscent of the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies (that latter was completed during the same year, 1889).

Taut, obdurate and resilient, the opening signals storms in the offing, though the dancing transition to the lyrical second subject marks a significant change of mood. Happily, all four players lean towards a telling sequence of tonal contrasts, though the desperately pleading central oration – led by the piano (3'32") – would have benefited from a more doggedly emphatic

string presence. Try by way of a comparison the Ax-Stern-Laredo-Ma recording (3'36" on their Sony Classical version). Then again, the London Bridge Trio do wonderfully well in the movement's mysterious coda (starting at around 7'11"), with its shimmering string tremolandos and aching modulations.

The slow movement is a model of touchingly sincere expression (note the gentle way violinist Tamsin Waley-Cohen wafts in at 1'18"). The lilting third movement wears a suave demeanour and the dancing finale occupies a place somewhere between the campfire and the tea room, though various darker asides remind us of the work's considerable scale.

The earlier D major Quartet sits, opus-wise, between the Serenade for Strings and the Fifth Symphony (all three works date from 1875, when Dvořák was in his early thirties) and inhabits a parallel world filled with sunshine. Models include Schubert, whose sizeable B flat Trio was a probable influence. With exposition repeat (as here), the work weighs in at around 33 minutes, Waley-Cohen again distinguishing herself with restrained expressiveness and just a hint of *portamento* (specifically in the first movement's exposition). An excellent CD and definitely a viable admission ticket to a musical world that is both accessible and musically substantial. **Rob Cowan**

Glass

String Quartet No 5. Suite from Dracula.

String Sextet (arr Riesman)^a

Carducci Quartet with ^a**Cian O'Dúill** *va*

^a**Gemma Rosefield** *vc*

Naxos American Classics © 8 559766 (65 • DDD)



The Carducci Quartet's impressive debut recording on Naxos featured the

first four of Philip Glass's string quartets (9/10). This release includes the composer's only other remaining quartet, completed in 1991, plus a suite from his 1998 soundtrack to Tod Browning's film *Dracula* (1931) and an arrangement for string sextet of the Third Symphony by Glass's longtime musical director and collaborator, Michael Riesman.

Glass has stated that his intention in the Fifth Quartet was to free the work from the burden of the medium's tradition by placing musicality rather than seriousness at its centre. He throws off the shackles of minimalism here, too. The opening theme's effusive lyrical tone may come as a surprise to some. The Fifth Quartet's clear

formal outline and sense of organic growth also make it Glass's most 'classical' (and arguably finest) quartet. Most impressive is the way in which the quartet manage to project its overall shape, imparting unity and coherence to the whole, and tying together the loose ends of the previous four movements in a very effective closing section.

As might be expected from a score to a Dracula film, the overall mood is darker and more sinister in the Suite. The Carducci's performance is imbued with a grainy, almost greyscale patina. In 'Excellent Mr Renfield' and 'Women in White', moments of eerie anticipation are punctuated by dramatic outbursts. The quartet is joined by Cian O'Duill (viola) and Gemma Rosefield (cello) for the string sextet arrangement of Glass's Symphony No 3. Written originally for a 19-piece string orchestra, the Third lends itself well to a chamber setting. There are a few moments when the lines split to one-to-a-part, but what is lost in weight and depth is more than made up in clarity, focus and forward momentum. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Grainger

Anonymous Angelus ad Virginem. Lisbon
CPE Bach March (BWV Anh122) **JS Bach** Das wohltemperirte Clavier: Book 1, Fugue No 4; Book 2, Prelude and Fugue No 5 **Ferrabosco II** The Four Note Pavan **Grainger** The Immovable Do. The Lonely Desert-Man Sees the Tents of the Happy Tribes **J Jenkins** Five-Part Fantasy No 15 **Josquin** La Bernardina **W Lawes** Six-Part Fantasy **Le Jeune** La bel' aronde **Machaut** Ballade No 17 **Olsen** Når jola kjem (two versions) (all arr Grainger)

Joyce Griggs saxes with **J Michael Holmes, Phil Pierick, Jesse Dochnahl, Adam Hawthorne, Drew Whiting, Ben Kenis, Adrienne Honnold** saxes
Casey Gene Dierlam pf
Naxos © 8 573228 (50' • DDD)



Niche is the word. Joyce Griggs gives us 50 minutes' worth of Percy Grainger's

transcriptions and arrangements for saxophone ensemble of folksongs and compositions by Bachs JS and CPE, William Lawes, John Jenkins and Josquin Desprez, juxtaposed against a pair of Grainger's own works – *The Immovable Do* (1933-39), adapted for saxophone choir by Griggs from the composer's original unspecified scoring, and *The Lonely Desert-Man Sees the Tents of the Happy Tribes* (1949) for saxophone and piano.

Historically the disc fulfils a useful function. Percy Grainger and the

saxophone evolved together. As Grainger was working on this material, the saxophone, via the efforts of Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young and Charlie Parker, had evolved into an expressively nuanced tool beyond anything that Adolphe Sax could have anticipated. But Grainger, despite his enthusiasm for the rough and tumble of jazz, appreciated the instrument for its timbral purity: the range of the human voice mirrored instrumentally over five octaves.

Aurally, though, this homogenised instrumental palette quickly lays down the law of diminishing returns. I'm not certain that Machaut's Ballade No 17 benefits especially from the clean-cut French style of saxophone-playing; nor does the politely controlled vibrato and perfumed equal temperament do much for William Lawes's Six-Part Fantasy, or the various bits of Bach included. That said, no one is likely to buy this disc anticipating authentic Bach. The point is that Grainger thought the saxophone was significant and found a personal way to use it, and that's been documented here – enough to satisfy a niche audience driven to seek out saxophone and/or Grainger curios.

Philip Clark

Hiller · Schumann

Hiller Piano Quintet, Op 156

Schumann Piano Quintet, Op 44

Tobias Koch pf **Pleyel Quartet, Cologne**
AVI-Music © AVI8553337 (66' • DDD)



Period-instrument recordings of Schumann's chamber masterpiece didn't much impress me when I surveyed them for a *Gramophone* Collection (12/07). This one, however – although it's unlikely to be anybody's reference version – has a particular claim to that elusive concept of 'authenticity', inasmuch as it was recorded at the Robert-Schumann-Haus, the composer's birthplace museum in Zwickau, using an 1860s piano from the workshop of Clara's cousin Wilhelm Wieck.

It's a fine-sounding instrument, with plenty of round-toned voice remaining after a century and a half. The Schumann House's concert hall seats 140 and looks most inviting, although it's not quite big enough for the exercise of recording a symphonic chamber work such as this; lines become entangled and can't readily be discerned by the ear. Andreas Gerhardus's viola doesn't quite cut through in the

Funeral March as it should, for example, and the most successful moments are the quiet ones, such as the Scherzo's first episode. Nevertheless, this is a decent performance, fleetier than some in the Funeral March and brisk in the finale, with a fine sense of homecoming as Schumann ties up all the loose contrapuntal threads in the work's magnificent denouement.

Ferdinand Hiller's Quintet escaped my notice when I rounded up 10 such works for a Specialist's Guide (2/14). Nevertheless, I noted then that the quintet medium often brings out the best in composers, and this G major work of 1873 is no exception, taking its most audible lead from Schumann's towering example (listen from around 6'20" in the opening *Allegro con anima* and elsewhere for near-cribs). Some moments of ripe intonation suggest that it's not quite so securely under the fingers as the Schumann but it presents a good case for Hiller, who is one of those men – like Frank Bridge – unfairly relegated to being best known for a work by another composer. **David Thresher**

Mendelssohn

Two String Quartets, Op 44

Cecilia Quartet

Analekta © AN2 9844 (52' • DDD)



The Cecilia Quartet came to international attention when they won the 2010 Banff

Quartet Competition. These days they combine an international touring schedule with a position as ensemble-in-residence at the University of Toronto. For their first Mendelssohn recording they refreshingly choose two of the lesser-played middle quartets. Lesser-played but in no way lesser masterpieces, and from the opening upwards-sweeping arpeggio of Op 44 No 1, the Cecilia prove to be compelling advocates. They find a fine balance between the composer's skittish qualities and his tenderer side, resulting in notably open-hearted readings. Their tremolos – such a favourite device of Mendelssohn – seem to come in 57 varieties, while even at *fortissimo* textures remain open and airy, thanks to their minutely considered voicings, conveyed via a sympathetic recording.

Highlights are many: the slow movement of Op 44 No 1 (which forms an enchanting encore to the Elias's Wigmore Hall Live recital), for instance, in which the first violin's fulsome melody is



The Cecilia Quartet offer excellent new accounts of Mendelssohn's two Op 44 Quartets on Analekta

perfectly balanced against *pizzicato* viola and cello; here the Cherubini make less of the *pizzicato* accompaniment, while the Escher are a tad more deliberate, speed-wise. The Cecilia's pacing of the same quartet's finale is also outstanding – with a real sense of *presto* yet still having time to phrase expressively. Both the Escher and Cherubini have a real drive here but slightly less variety in their tonal palette.

The second quartet is just as engaging, its first movement given with affection without becoming saccharine, Mendelssohn's many transformations of the yearning opening motif inviting a response of great variety from the Cecilia. I only wish that they'd included the exposition repeat (also missing from the first movement of Op 44 No 1). The Elias take this movement strikingly slowly but lend it an introversion that is enormously effective; the Cherubini and Eroica, also relatively spacious, are less heart-on-sleeve. The Cecilia capture the innocent quality of the slow movement's opening, subtly reacting as Mendelssohn's harmonic language darkens. And, as in the finale of Op 44 No 1, they combine energy with finely pointed details. A terrific achievement.

Harriet Smith

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Cherubini Qt (8/93⁸) (EMI) 500857-2

Eroica Qt (HARM) HMU90 7287

Op 44 No 1 – selected comparison:

Escher Qt (10/15) (BIS) BIS1990

Op 44 No 2; Op 44 No 1 (3rd movt) – selected comparison:

Elias Qt (10/09) (WIGM) WHLIVE0028

Muffat

Florilegium primum

Ensemble Salzburg Barock

Challenge Classics  CC72678 (71' • DDD/DSD)



Performers' interest in the music of Georg Muffat has always centred on his

Armonico tributo of 1682, in which he demonstrated for the benefit of his Austro-German colleagues the new concerto grosso style of Corelli, learnt at first hand during two years spent in Rome. The beautiful 'Passaglia' from Concerto No 5 has become a bit of a concert favourite in its own right. Performances and recordings of his two *Florilegium* sets (1695 and 1698) are considerably rarer. In these he looked in the other direction and served up exemplars of the French dance-suite style,

which, again, he had experienced for himself while studying with Lully in Paris. This in itself may explain their relative neglect, for compared to the engaging trajectories of the concertos, the suites – usually consisting of an *ouverture* and six or seven dances lasting between three minutes and 30 seconds – are less cohesive. Their Frenchness can hardly be faulted; sarabandes, bourrées, gavottes, gigue and the like, all in five-part string texture, all neatly shaped and sounding eminently danceable, with only a slightly more rooted approach to melody and phrasing (reminiscent of Purcell's response to French dance music, so no bad thing!) perhaps hinting at non-French origins.

Ensemble Salzburg Barock perform the eight suites of *Florilegium primum* with style and what has come to seem a typically Austrian forthright and grainy sound that perhaps derives from Harnoncourt and the Vienna Concentus Musicus. The focused studio acoustic probably contributes to that, as well as to clarity of the texture, though it can also be a touch hard on intonation slips and occasional tiny bow squeaks. There is more exciting Austrian Baroque ensemble music than this around but this release serves it well enough.

Lindsay Kemp

Schubert

'Schubertiade - Du holde Kunst, ich danke dir' Arpeggione Sonata, D821. Piano Trio No 2, D929 - Andante. Piano Quintet, 'Trout', D667. Allegro, 'Lebensstürme', D947. Divertissement à la hongroise, D818. Fantasie, D940. Marche caractéristique, D886 No 2. Sonatina No 3, D408. An die Musik, D547. An Silvia, D891. Auf der Bruck, D853. Drei Gesänge, D902. Du bist die Ruh', D776. Du liebst mich nicht, D756. Ganymed, D544. Der Gondelfahrer, D809. Gretchen am Spinnrade, D118. Der Hirst auf dem Felsen, D965. Die junge Nonne, D828. Der König in Thule, D367. Meeres Stille, D216. Die Nacht, D983c. Nachtgesang im Walde, D913. Nacht und Träume, D827. La pastorella al Prato, D513. Ständchen, D920. Die Taubenpost, D965. Der Tod und das Mädchen, D531. Der Wanderer, D489. Der Zwerg, D771

Yeree Suh *sop* **Marianne Beate Kielland** *mez*
Thomas Bauer *bar* **Claire Chevallier** *fp*
Schubertiade Quartett Bayerischer Wald;
Anima Eterna Brugge / Jos van Immerseel *fp*
Alpha Ⓢ ④ ALPHA216 (4h 42' • DDD • T/t)



This is the second release on Alpha to celebrate the 70th birthday of Jos van

Immerseel. The first was a coupling with his Anima Eterna orchestra of Janáček and Dvořák (10/15), but this feels in all senses a more relaxed affair, both in terms of the project and its execution.

On each of the set's four discs Immerseel presents an imagined Schubertiade, but is not attempting historical reconstructions, he says in his booklet-note. He aims instead for 'varietas', an aim that he certainly achieves, mixing music rare and well known. There are some wonderful vocal quartets, for example, with perhaps the disarming 'Der Gondelfahrer' the pick of the bunch, sensitively sung by baritone Bauer (also entrusted with the baritone songs across the set) and his colleagues in the evocatively named Schubertiade Quartett Bayerischer Wald.

It's great, too, to have a good batch of piano duet pieces, for which Immerseel is joined by Claire Chevallier on a sweetly mellow Conrad Graf instrument from 1826 in performances of a relaxed intimacy and musicality that is entirely in keeping with the project. The instrument itself is nicely captured by the warm recording. There's not much that's very stormy about the late *Lebensstürme* Allegro, however, or the wilder sections of the *Fantasie*. Immerseel and Chevallier also seem slightly oblivious to the magic of these works' many heart-stopping modulations: they sound prosaic, for

example, at the magical shift to the major in the *Fantasie*'s first F sharp minor *Largo* section (at 5'50"). (A quick listen to Robert Levin and Malcolm Bilson on an admittedly brighter and less clangorous 1830 Graf demonstrates what more can be done here.)

The piano itself, although obviously having great claims to special authenticity, holds the chamber works back a little, too. In the *Trout* Quintet, for example, Immerseel seems to be confined to a limited *mezzo-piano* to *mezzo-forte* range, even if there's some wonderful delicacy throughout from his colleagues – and it's interesting to hear how much more relaxed and measured this performance is than his earlier Sony account with L'Archibudelli.

Steffano Veggetti is seductively sweet-toned on his 1750 violoncello piccolo in the Arpeggione Sonata, and Midori Seiler similarly appealing in the D408 Violin Sonatina. All three come together for an account of the E flat Trio's *Andante*, a slightly anomalous odd-one-out, not least since the work, composed for the virtuoso violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh and his colleagues, is conceived on an altogether grander scale.

Immerseel is perhaps at his best in the song accompaniments, bringing gentle flexibility and constant insight to his part, even if Yeree Suh's soubretish soprano and Marianne Beate Kielland's small-scale mezzo don't really seem well matched to the dramatic demands of some of the bigger numbers; I find Bauer's baritone contributions more consistently satisfying. It's notable that the booklet refers primarily to the cosy *Gemütlichkeit* of Schubert's Vienna, choosing to ignore the quiet rebelliousness that was a constant beneath the Biedermeier veneer of the Metternich era. This set offers a great deal to enjoy but might have been more compelling had the performances sought to capture the latter as well as the former. **Hugo Shirley**

Fantasie, D940 – selected comparison:

Levin, Bilson (ARCH) 453 491-2AH

Trout Quintet, D667 – selected comparison:

Immerseel, L'Archibudelli (2/99*) (NEWT) 8802087

Smetana · Tchaikovsky

Smetana Piano Trio, Op 15

Tchaikovsky Piano Trio, Op 50

Trio Con Brio Copenhagen

Orchid Ⓢ ORC100051 (74' • DDD)



Among these piano trios' defining features, optimism does not loom high. Smetana's mourns his eldest daughter Bedřiska, who

had just died, aged four, from scarlet fever, while Tchaikovsky's was written 'in memory of a great artist', his friend and teacher Nikolay Rubinstein. But Trio Con Brio Copenhagen never overplay the 'tragedy' card.

Their hallmarks are vitality and an ability to let in every chink of light, both of which serve them well in Tchaikovsky's A minor Trio, Op 15. They come to the fore in the first few tracks of the *Tema con variazioni* and the beginning of tr 7, where pianist Jens Elvekjaer comes into his own; not even Trio Wanderer or the Gould Trio boast such pixie-fingered soloists. It's all the more striking, then, when the players do give way to grief and anguish. They do it unreservedly, with a thrust that highlights the work's monumental design. They do it as though for the first time, befitting the spontaneity of Tchaikovsky's language. What they don't always do is pay enough attention to textural clarity and balance. Ensembles such as the Gould have a better grasp of that.

In Smetana's G minor Trio, Op 15, however, no such issues persist. This is an excellent performance all round, showcasing an airtight ensemble, but also these Danish-based musicians' flair for colouristic detail. They are consistently compelling, whether in the howling opening statement, the tender dips into lyricism or the tightly coiled whirring that constitutes the Scherzo. And even if the Dvořák Trio outmatches them in terms of emotional amplitude, any group would be hard-pressed to imitate this blend of verve and poise. **Hannah Nepil**

Tchaikovsky – selected comparison:

Trio Wanderer (2/14) (HARM) HMC90 2161

Smetana – selected comparison:

Dvořák Trio (3/14) (SUPR) SU41442-2

See 'Musician and the Score' on page 44

'Harmonie & Turcherie'

Donizetti Sinfonia for Winds **Giuseppe Donizetti**

Marcia di Mahmoud (arr Bernardini) **M Haydn**

Marcia turchesca, ST610/P65 **J Haydn** Die

sieben letzten Worte, HobXX/2 - Introduzione

alla seconda parte **Mendelssohn** Nocturno,

MWV P1 **Mozart** Die Entführung aus dem Serail

- Janissary March **Rossini** Il turco in Italia -

Sinfonia (arr Mandolesi) **Schubert** Eine kleine

Trauermusik, D79 **Spoehr** Notturmo, Op 34 **Witt**

Concertino for Oboe and Winds

Zefiro / Alfredo Bernardini

Arcana Ⓢ A391 (79' • DDD)



The Habsburg Empire defeated the Ottoman Empire following the Siege of Vienna in



Gleefully clattery: Alfredo Bernardini (playing the two-keyed oboe) and Zefiro make a joyful noise taking Turkish inspiration

1683, ending the centuries of Muslim incursions into Europe and finally reclaiming Hungary and regions of the Balkans. The ensuing century saw improving relations between the two societies and a growing trade in 'oriental' items such as jewellery, carpets, spices, coffee – and musical ideas. The most famous expression of the Western vogue for all things Turkish is Mozart's *Die Entführung* but as late as the second decade of the 19th century Rossini was able to capitalise on the meme in *Il turco in Italia*.

Harmonie – wind bands – were also an important part of Enlightenment entertainment and here Alfredo Bernardini and Zefiro offer a selection of works relying to varying extents on wind instruments and Turkish percussion. Some of it is gleefully noisy (Mozart's *Entführung* march; Donizetti's deliciously loopy sinfonia), making full use of drums, tambours, triangles and the jingling Johnny. Matters are calmer in music by the young Schubert and Mendelssohn, not to mention the older (and elder) Haydn. Giuseppe Donizetti – Gaetano's elder brother – actually worked as Instructor General to the Ottomans and composed the march included here, which became the empire's national anthem.

The largest work here is Spohr's counterintuitively clattery *Notturmo* from 1815, which closes the disc: wind and janissary bands combine and a clarinet takes the lead – not to mention a posthorn solo in the Polacca. The occasional ripe tuning and audible keywork really only add to the fun provided by this comprehensively annotated and well-filled disc. **David Thresher**

'Singing Cello'

Falla *Suite populaire espagnole* **Fauré** *Après un rêve*, Op 7 No 1 **Kreisler** *Liebesleid* **Liszt** *Romance oubliée*, S132 **Mahler** *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* – No 3, *Ich hab' ein glühend Messer*; No 4, *Die zwei blauen Augen* **Mendelssohn** *Albumblatt* **Rachmaninov** *Two Pieces*, Op 2 **Schumann** *Liederkreis*, Op 39 – No 5, *Mondnacht*; No 7, *Auf einer Burg*; No 9, *Wehmut*; No 10, *Zwielicht* **Suk** *Serenade*, Op 3 No 2

István Várdai vc **Julien Quentin** pf
Hungaroton © HCD32741 (61' • DDD)



At first glance one might think that the title of this disc heralds a selection of songs

transcribed for cello. And in fact 12 of the 19 tracks are exactly that, including four numbers from Schumann's *Liederkreis*, Op 39, and the six movements of Falla's *Suite populaire espagnole*. Might it have been better programming to retain this theme? The remaining tracks are the perfectly pleasant but apparently arbitrary choices of original instrumental works by Suk, Mendelssohn and Rachmaninov (rarely heard), Fauré and Kreisler (much recorded).

Rachmaninov's *Two Pieces*, Op 2 ('Prelude' and 'Danse orientale') are poised and well characterised (they were written in 1892, the same year as the Op 3 *Morceaux de fantaisie* that includes the famous Prelude in C sharp minor). I particularly liked the Falla pieces, especially the concluding 'Jota', and Schumann's 'Mondnacht', sounds very well on the cello; but despite the accomplished playing and natural balance of the recording, I can't say that Várdai has the personality of a Maisky or the very different Isserlis, whose visits to the recording studio in similar repertory are always of compelling interest. Julien Quentin, though given subordinate billing on the cover, is an equal partner in the sound picture, ably contributing to the intimate salon atmosphere of the whole disc, which comes with a confusing and inadequate booklet. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Leonid Kogan

Tully Potter celebrates the greatest violinist he ever heard in concert, the Soviet player Leonid Kogan, whose rare talent is happily well represented on a host of recordings

Mention Leonid Kogan's name, and violin connoisseurs' eyes light up. He remains the greatest violinist I have seen in concert. Often bracketed with David Oistrakh, he was very different: Kogan's training was pure Leopold Auer – his initial teacher Philip Yampolsky (1931-34) was an Auer pupil and his main mentor Abram Yampolsky (1934-51) had studied with an Auer assistant. But after the Second World War, Kogan, with one or two others such as Yulian Sitkovetsky, proposed a new style of violinism, based on a startling cleanliness of execution. Nature gave him hands with unusually long fourth fingers; and with his natural platform manner and classical stance – weight neatly distributed between his feet, back perfectly arched – he looked as if he had been born playing the violin. In truth, after the usual boyhood rebellions, he worked like a veritable Stakhanov to achieve perfection.

Born in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, on November 14, 1924, he died of a heart attack on a train on the way to Mytishchi on December 17, 1982. In the 1950s he was part of Soviet musical royalty, married to the violinist Elizaveta Gilels and brother-in-law of Emil Gilels. Towards the end of that decade, he reportedly got into the toils of the KGB – no wonder he developed an ulcer and a heart complaint. Lurid rumours were spread, but all I ever substantiated was that he was forced to file a report on Mstislav Rostropovich for 'anti-Soviet remarks', after their 1959 British tour. The resulting bust-up ended their friendship. While noting that Kogan, a convinced Communist, championed several composers who suffered under the regime, let us leave all of this aside and celebrate his art, which was of rare depth.

Kogan preferred live recordings to studio sessions. Like Heifetz, whom he venerated – the admiration was returned – he has been systematically reissued on CD. A vast Melodiya LP edition was taken up by Arlecchino (France) and

Triton (Japan); and his EMI output (much already on Testament) is in a Warner box from Korea. Browsing the internet brings many rewards.

Beginning as a Paganini specialist, who scintillated in the D major Concerto (with the Sauret cadenza) and played all 24 Caprices in one evening, Kogan developed into the finest exponent of the Beethoven and Brahms concertos of his era. The beauty and intensity of his artistry in Beethoven's *Larghetto* can be heard on five studio recordings and various live renderings. The Brahms, in which he was one of the few to make the outer movements sound as if they came from the same work, was best achieved with Kyrill Kondrashin in Moscow in 1967. Among the 30-odd concertos he recorded, I have mental snapshots of many felicities. Miraculously matched pure tones in the Bach Double, with his wife and the Moscow Chamber Orchestra under Rudolf Barshai. A perfect

tempo for the *Andante* of Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante*, with son Pavel on viola and MCO/Barshai. Beautifully judged *portamenti* in the *Adagio* of Mozart's G major. Canny tempo relationships in Lalo's five-movement *Symphonie espagnole*. Natural ease in the Mendelssohn-Bruch coupling, with Maazel. Aristocratic élan in the finale of the Tchaikovsky, so tawdry in some players' hands. Unforced style and crackling rhythm in Prokofiev's Second Concerto. Coruscating virtuosity in Khachaturian's Concerto and Paganini's D major. Heroic tension in his lofty view of

Shostakovich's First Concerto. Unsentimental tenderness in Revol Bunin's *Symphonic Concerto*, or the Berg, or the Barber. The inherent 'rightness' of every bar in the Weinberg Concerto, best of the works written for him.

Kogan excelled in chamber music, too. The trio with Emil Gilels and Rostropovich produced a legendary *Archduke*, as well as sovereign interpretations of Haydn, Mozart, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saëns,

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1934 – *First hearing of Jascha Heifetz*

'I attended all of his concerts and can remember until now every note played by him. He was the ideal artist for me.'

•1941 – *Concerto debut in Moscow*

The 16-year-old Conservatory student plays the Brahms Violin Concerto, to huge acclaim, with the Moscow Philharmonic under Karl Eliasberg.

•1947 – *Co-winner of World Youth Festival in Prague*

Gives world premiere of the Sonata by Karen Khachaturian with the composer (Aram's nephew) at the piano.

•1951 – *Wins Queen Elizabeth Competition in Brussels*

Entered on Stalin's orders 10 days before the event starts, Kogan triumphs with Paganini's D major Concerto.

•1955 – *His career finally gets under way*

Within three years he makes all his major Western debuts and in 1956-57 plays a 'historic' cycle of 18 concertos in Moscow.

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING

Beethoven Violin Concerto

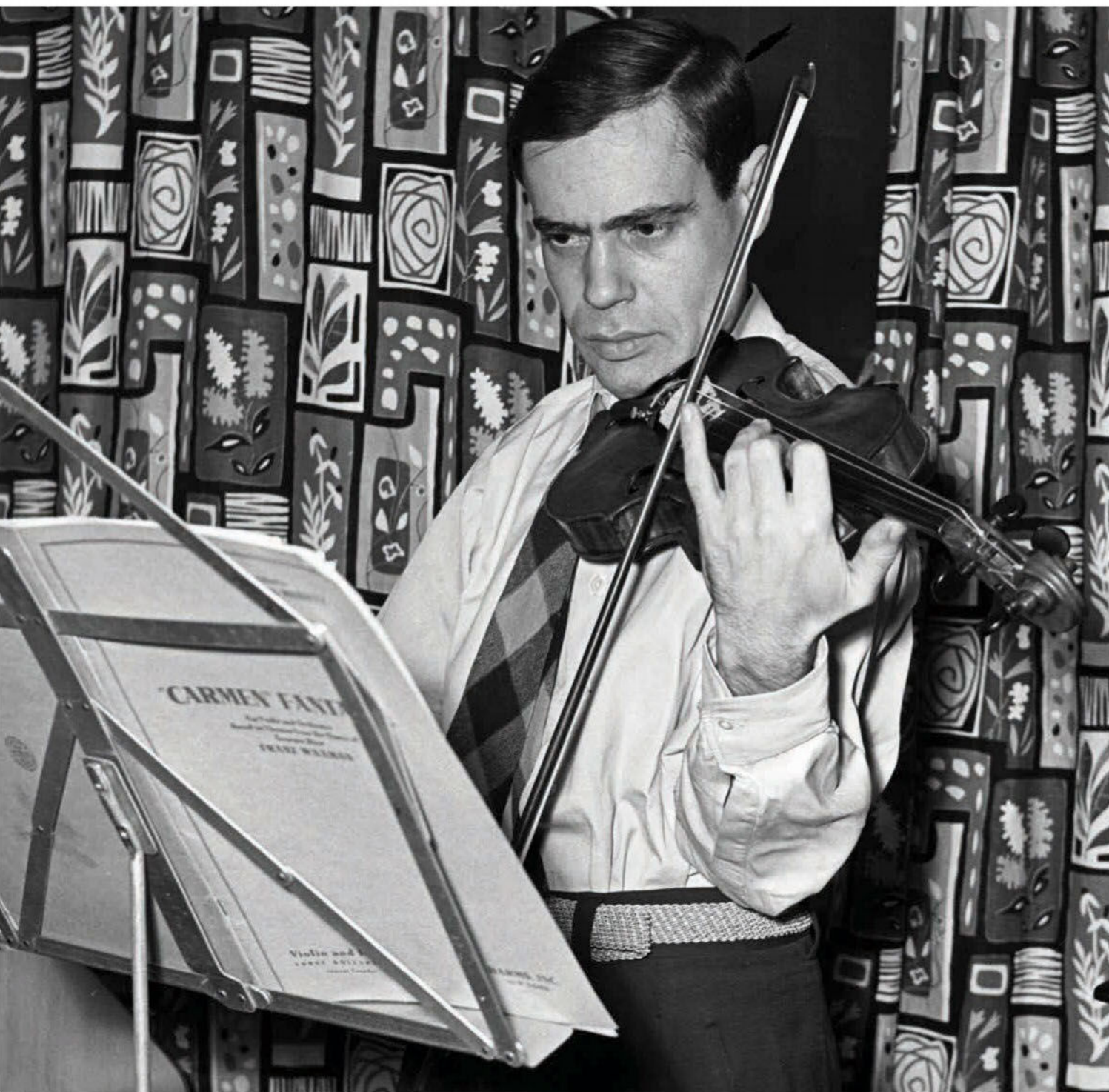
Brahms Violin Sonata in D minor, Op 108

Leonid Kogan *vn* Nina Kogan *pf*



USSR State SO/
Evgeni Svetlanov

Melodiya (M)
MELCD10 01404
(Rec Moscow,
March 25, 1981 &
October 1982)



Shostakovich and Fauré. With Gilels and Yakov Shapiro, Kogan recorded Brahms's Horn Trio; and for a glorious Rachmaninov Trio he was teamed with Evgeni Svetlanov and Fedor Luzanov. In Tchaikovsky's Sextet, this latter-day Auer led a galaxy of Russian string stars; and he taped Beethoven string trios with Barshai and Rostropovich. His sonata partnership with Grigory Ginzburg shone in Mozart, Grieg and Beethoven's *Kreutzer*; a remarkable recital with Emil Gilels featured Beethoven's *Spring*, *Kreutzer* and Op 12 No 3;

Kogan, with one or two others, proposed a new style of violinism, based on a startling cleanliness of execution

Kogan's violin duo with Elizaveta Gilels seemed telepathic; and his duo with their pianist daughter Nina displayed a familial sympathy. A favourite of mine is Mendelssohn's early

Concerto for Piano and Violin, with Nina and Leonid as soloists and Pavel conducting.

Best DVD? Shostakovich's First Concerto with the USSR State SO and Svetlanov, for the composer's posthumous 70th birthday in 1976. Kogan rises royally to the occasion – surely a prince of fiddlers. **G**

Instrumental



Charlotte Gardner welcomes a first recording of Vilsmaÿr Partitas

'This is music that demands our full attention, presented in such a manner as to ensure that it gets it' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**



Jed Distler listens to composers reimagining Sondheim songs:

'The pieces generally fare best when composers remain true to their own stylistic selves and stay focused' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 65**

JS Bach

Solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas, BWV1001-1006

Pavel Šporcl *vn*

Supraphon (M) ② SU4186-2 (149' • DDD)



From the sound you might expect this performance by the Czech violinist Pavel

Šporcl to be a straightforward period-instrument recording. The clear-but-thin early-music tone of his (blue) violin speaks beautifully into the glowing acoustics of the Prague Chapel of the Czech Brethren despite being fundamentally underpowered for these pieces, and all his trademark precision and lightness of touch are on immediate display. But the reading itself is so unmistakably Romantic that instead it creates a perplexing confusion.

It is evident throughout that Šporcl is striving to balance these works' three most important requirements: variation in tone colour, forward motion and contrapuntal sense. Basic tempi are extremely well judged and controlled, but the pulling about of the phrasing is constantly playing mischief in the background, making it seem so Romantic and micromanaged. When Bach makes the listener work so hard to hear the harmony and its direction, it is vital to have a truly discernible pulse to latch on to. If the *Allegro assai* of the C major Sonata has a fabulous sense of *moto perpetuo* and a resulting strong shape and direction, then the movement that follows it, the E major Partita's Preludio, though of equal speed and purpose, has a pulse that continually drags its feet with over-emphasis. Other movements suffer from similar stalling: the languorous stretching of the broken chords in the *Adagio* that opens the C major Sonata cuts the music up into single-bar chunks, for instance, and the over-ornamentation of its Fuga hampers any chance of following Bach's ideas through the movement. The great Chaconne has similar issues – the melody, which should speak directly

from the alto line, suddenly disappears after a minute or so, just as it starts to make some progress.

There are some performances that manage to avoid sounding 'over-managed' in this way despite a fundamentally similar approach – Christian Tetzlaff's first version, for instance, or Gil Shaham's second. But when responding to the minutiae of these works on such a 'micro' level there is always a risk that equal attention will not be paid to the 'macro'. Once that bigger picture is lost, so are the good elements, and the whole begins – regrettably – to grate. **Caroline Gill**

Selected comparisons:

Shaham (3/15) (CAN) CC14

Tetzlaff (VIRG) 522034-2

Brahms

'The Complete Solo Piano Music, Vol 3'

Variations on a Hungarian Melody, Op 21 No 2.

Piano Pieces – Op 76; Op 118. Waltzes, Op 39

Jonathan Plowright *pf*

BIS (E) ② BIS2127 (81' • DDD/DSD)



Jonathan Plowright's complete Brahms piano music for BIS, inaugurated in 2013,

has now reached Vol 3, with all its intelligence, subtlety and power in full blossom. Other pianists – Leon McCawley, Stephen Hough and Andreas Haefliger among them – have hinted at a new direction, or perhaps a restoration, in Brahms interpretation. Plowright, in his original, thoughtful way, leads the pack. Thick, muddy textures awash in pedal (sounds patently unachievable on the latest pianos Brahms knew) and leaden tempi so characteristic of the mid-20th-century approach to this music are rapidly and happily becoming things of the past.

One thing that makes Plowright's interpretations so compelling is that they sound totally fresh, as though a fully formed, cultured musician, unencumbered by conventional approaches or received

wisdom, took up these scores for the first time in maturity. The results are often unexpected, yet always apt and never less than convincing.

The B minor Capriccio (Op 76 No 2) is unrushed, diffident, as though confiding its drolleries in a whisper. The robust C sharp minor Capriccio (No 5), with its swaggering cross-rhythms and passionate assertions, creates a miniature epic. It's difficult to think of another performance that delineates the mercurial mood-swings of the C major Capriccio (No 8) with greater finesse and insight.

Delicacy and heartfelt sentiment characterise the gracious A major Intermezzo (Op 118 No 2), illustrating Plowright's gift for evoking sentiment without sentimentality. The story told in the G minor Ballade (No 3) is filled with lean, mean, no-nonsense resolve, while the much-belaboured E flat minor Intermezzo (No 6) emerges here unequivocally powerful, its eloquence partly due to *secco staccatos* and crystalline textures.

The Waltzes, Op 39, for all their unfettered ebullience, present the same wealth of detail that characterises Opp 76 and 118. The *Variations on a Hungarian Melody* provide a charming overture to the programme. I have a feeling this is going to be the benchmark Brahms survey for some time to come. **Patrick Rucker**

Chopin

Piano Sonata No 2, Op 35.

Preludes, Op 28. Nocturne No 13,

Op 48 No 1. Polonaise No 6, Op 53

Seong-Jin Cho *pf*

DG (E) 479 5332GH (73' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Warsaw Philharmonic Concert Hall, October 2015



When the 21-year-old South Korean Seong-Jin Cho won

the 17th Chopin Competition last October, it seemed only a matter of seconds before DG



Warsaw Chopin Competition winner Seong-Jin Cho offers plenty of virtuosity in his debut recording

had produced a commercial disc out of his live performances in Warsaw. It's easy to understand. Cho is impressive.

What is not clear is exactly when these performances were captured. During the actual rounds? During the winner's recital? The booklet doesn't help, beyond mentioning the month and the hall where the recording was made. An audience is evident only at the end of the A flat Polonaise and in some quiet moments of the C minor Nocturne. Whatever the case, it's possible that, in a couple of decades, Cho may be less than grateful to his DG producers for having captured him, up-close and personal – and for commercial consumption – during the enormous pressures attendant before, during and after any international piano competition.

There are lovely moments in the Preludes. The expert pacing of No 2 (A minor) turns silences to strong dramatic effect. No 4 (E minor) achieves a genuine pathos, though its eloquence could have been heightened by not rushing the *forte* passage. Misplaced rubato disturbs the momentum of No 9 (E major). A slow, soft start to a phrase that should be strong and decisive from the beginning scuttles

No 18 (F minor). Predictably, No 24 (D minor) is note-perfect. Generally, Cho's playing exhibits admirable clarity of texture, though when things get hot musically he frequently succumbs to the youthful temptation to speed up. Of the many sets of Preludes that have appeared this season, this may be the most uneven. Musically speaking, it is a far cry from the magisterial set by Cho's compatriot Dong-Hyek Lim. (The comparison, however inevitable, is of course unfair: Lim is a decade Cho's senior and his Preludes were recorded in a studio.)

For all its turbulent enthusiasm, the B flat minor Sonata seldom strays beyond the routine. If Cho may be said to have an Achilles heel, it is an inexplicable rhythmic instability that surfaces without warning or reason; unfortunately the C minor Nocturne, Op 49 No 1, serves as its veritable showcase. Despite the perfection of the *pianissimo* left-hand octaves in the Trio of the A flat Polonaise, the dance itself seems shorn of defining characteristics: poised hauteur, elegant phrasing, and breadth and sweep of gesture.

Patrick Rucker

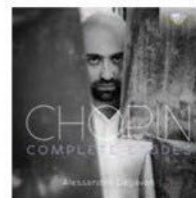
*Preludes – selected comparison:
Lim (11/15) (WARN) 2564 60688-8*

Chopin

Complete Etudes

Alessandro Deljavan *pf*

Brilliant @ 95207 (70' • DDD)



It may be that the Italian pianist Alessandro Deljavan is destined for a

controversial career. He is a highly demonstrative player whose incessant movements and exaggerated, protean facial expressions make Lang Lang seem a model of restrained immobility. Moreover, Deljavan adamantly maintains that curbing his extramusical mannerisms would impede his response to the music.

Fortunately he has already made a number of recordings that allow listeners to bypass visual distractions and focus on the piano-playing, and in his latest offering, Chopin's 27 Etudes, his musical and pianistic personality is displayed in high relief. Deljavan is first and foremost a lyrical player. For him, the phrase is paramount, an excellent attribute in a Chopin player. His imagination is vivid, though sometimes it leads him into a

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stylistic no man's land, where details are worried to death and the forest is lost for the trees.

The exquisite E major Etude (Op 10 No 3) maintains a persuasive lyrical calm, followed by a C sharp minor (No 4) that is furious, galvanised and exciting. The sprightly energy of 'Black Keys' (No 5) seems particularly apt, and the 'Revolutionary' (No 12) roils without becoming overblown. The sustained *cantabile* of the 'Cello' Etude (Op 25 No 7) rises to poignant eloquence.

Yet there are moments when one wishes Deljavan would forsake his quest for a personal statement and play it straight, allowing Chopin to speak for himself. Overly lavish rubato reduces the quirkily dissonant E minor (Op 25 No 5) to sentimental salon fare, while a reflexive *tenuto* applied to the first note of left-hand phrases in the 'Thirds' Etude (No 6) grows tiresome. Unbridled tempo fluctuations rob the F minor (Op 10 No 9) of momentum and a good bit of character.

In these days of multivalent cosmopolitan pianism seemingly free of technical limitations, it is probably impossible for any pianist to stake territorial claim on the Chopin Etudes the way Wilhelm Backhaus could in the 1920s, or Maurizio Pollini in the 1960s. But if Deljavan's Etudes are far from the last word, they are original, occasionally provocative and often compelling. **Patrick Rucker**

Selected comparisons:

Pollini (1/12) (TEST) SBT1473

Backhaus (PROF) PH10070

Debussy

Children's Corner. Images – Book 2.

Préludes – Book 2

Michel Dalberto *pf*

Aparté Ⓢ AP111 (68' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Teatro Bibiena, Mantua,

May 30, 2015



Writing in his accompanying essay, 'A look at French musical life from

1829-1914', Michel Dalberto makes an intriguing claim. For him Debussy's piano music owes more to Liszt than to Chopin with its 'blazing intensity...and moments of madness that shatter all conventions'. And here, surely, is a clue to his bold-as-brass reaction against, say, Giesecking's legendary opalescence.

Dalbarto's way with the *Children's Corner* suite (that sophisticated and occasionally pained reflection on lost innocence) is

hardly subtle. 'Doctor Gradus', in particular, is loud and ostentatiously (some would say vividly) inflected, and a demand for *pp*, *doux et estompé* in 'The Snow is Dancing' is given short shrift. The 'Golliwog's Cakewalk' goes with a swing and a bounce, yet even here there is a lack of that finesse which should be at the heart of all performances of the finest French piano music.

Again, throughout the second book of *Images*, too many shadows and whispered confidences are dragged into broad daylight. There is greater success in the more extrovert numbers from the second book of *Préludes*, in the drunken capers of 'General Lavine' or in the soaring rockets and Bengal lights of 'Feux d'artifice'. But even here the playing lacks much beyond surface brio. The Fazioli's sound has a percussive edge and so there is little competition for Giesecking (EMI), more recently Bavouzet and Hamelin, and most of all for Michelangeli (DG), an ultimate keyboard aristocrat. **Bryce Morrison**

Selected comparison:

Bavouzet (7/07, 7/08, 12/08) (CHAN)

CHAN10421, CHAN10467, CHAN10497

Préludes, Images – selected comparison:

Hamelin (11/14) (HYPE) CDA67920

Glinka · Tchaikovsky

'Russian Piano Music for Four Hands'

Glinka Kamarinskaya (arr Balakirev).

Valse-fantaisie (arr Lyapunov). Capriccio on Russian Themes. Two Trots de cavalerie (Sabre Dances). Polka initiale Tchaikovsky Fifty Russian Folksongs

Cyprien Katsaris, Alexander Ghindin *pf*

Piano21 Ⓢ P21 046N (66' • DDD)



Is there a more omnivorous pianist on the planet than Cyprien Katsaris?

Few equal the breadth and quantity of his repertoire. Even fewer issue their recordings on their own label. Katsaris is in love with – and is particularly adept at playing – 19th-century repertoire (Alkan, he once told me, is one of the few composers of the period that does not attract him).

Here, in the company of Alexander Ghindin, he offers a typically unexpected programme of Glinka's music arranged for four hands. *Kamarinskaya* ('Fantaisie sur deux airs russes pour orchestre') – the first orchestral work based entirely on Russian folksong – and the *Capriccio sur des thèmes russes* (composed in 1834 but not published until 1904) were obvious

candidates for the attention of Mily Balakirev, the former piece having a profound influence on the succeeding generation of Russian composers.

These are played (and recorded) superbly well, but what really captured my attention was the performance of the *Valse-fantaisie* arranged by Sergey Lyapunov, which has exactly the same rhythmic verve and suavity as the famous 1929 recording of the waltz from Arensky's Suite for two pianos by Harold Bauer and Ossip Gabrilowitsch.

After three brief but charming Glinka trifles, Katsaris and Ghindin play the entire sequence of *Fifty Russian Folksongs* as harmonised by Tchaikovsky at the request of the publisher Jurgenson (they appeared in 1869). The shortest lasts just 16 seconds, the longest 1'50". Not a listening experience with which one can become deeply involved, but quite fascinating to hear themes subsequently used in other works: for example 'Vanya was sitting on the divan' is the *Andante* from Tchaikovsky's First String Quartet; No 48 is the 1812 Overture; Nos 28 and 42 can be heard in the finale of the Serenade for Strings.

Katsaris and Ghindin give every impression of two like-minded souls sharing their affection for this music with an intimate gathering of their friends. Piano buffs need not hesitate. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Kapustin

Piano Sonatas – No 1, 'Sonata-Fantasia', Op 39;

No 7, Op 64. Ten Bagatelles, Op 59 – No 6, Comodo; No 9, Allegretto. Eight Concert Etudes, Op 40 – No 1, Prelude; No 7, Intermezzo.

Variations, Op 41

Sun Hee You *pf*

Piano Classics Ⓢ PCLO098 (66' • DDD)



Some people seem to click instantly with the light-hearted jazz-classical fusion of

Ukrainian Nikolai Kapustin. For me, I confess, it took a little while to appreciate that Scriabinesque harmonies and Oscar Peterson-style figuration can be tossed around so casually without sounding merely like a novelty act. I'm still not a fully signed-up devotee. Occasionally the added-note chords and foursquare phrases are just so close to retro restaurant music that I can't get past the association. It's all good clean fun but also terribly middle-of-the-road, even as played deadpan by the composer himself. And when Latin American rhythms are thrown into the mix, it still sounds like little more than a throwback to Ginastera.

But such blatancy is certainly not an adequate description of the Seventh Sonata; and having found the wavelength for its rhapsodic invention (which includes the most un-minuet-like minuet you are ever likely to come across) I found it easier to go back and find imaginative resourcefulness in the First Sonata and extracts from Kapustin's *Concert Etudes*. Still, the Variations worry me slightly; this is a mere *jeu d'esprit*, isn't it, this fooling around with the opening theme of *The Rite of Spring*?

The young South Korean Sun Hee You is a fleet-fingered and energetic exponent. On her Yamaha instrument she may not find quite the range of colour or mood as Steven Osborne. But the First Sonata is the only direct comparison here, and those without access to the composer's own account of the Seventh Sonata on Triton (available as a download only, so far as I can tell) will surely welcome the newcomer as a real contender. **David Fanning**

Piano Sonata No 1 – selected comparison:

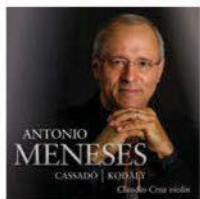
Osborne (8/00) (HYPE) CDA67159

Kodály · Cassadó

Cassadó Solo Cello Suite Kodály Solo Cello Suite, Op 8. Duo, Op 7^a

Antonio Meneses *vc* **Claudio Cruz** *vn*

Avie Ⓢ AV2351 (73' • DDD)



Two key aspects of Zoltán Kodály's groundbreaking Solo Cello Sonata sit side

by side: its ambitious extension of the instrument's tonal properties (facilitated in part by selected retuning) and its use of material that sounds like daily musical bread for Hungarian peasants. János Starker famously toured the piece worldwide, claiming that it paid for his backyard swimming pool, and his various recordings of the work – the earliest of which admitted some textual cuts – still take some beating. Another vintage classic is by Zara Nelsova, now out in the 53-CD set 'The Decca Sound: Mono Years 1944-1956' box (3/15), the sonata's opening intense virtually to the point of self-combustion. Alisa Weilerstein's recent recording (Decca, 1/15) is another winner, energetic, impassioned and technically formidable.

Antonio Meneses occupies a position just beneath their ranks with a performance that has been crafted down to the tiniest detail, the swirling finale in particular confident and polished, with every technical trick in the cellist's book pulled off with panache. And yet I do have one small reservation:

Kodály's Op 8 needs to sound like a well-crafted but intense improvisation, and, for all Meneses's assurance, intensity is at a premium. The sound, though, is excellent, with a real buzz to the C string, and with fine sonic definition in the other big work too, the Op 7 Duo.

There's an obvious rapport here with the violinist Claudio Cruz, especially in the playful folk-dance antics that sit at the centre of the finale. Again a benchmark begs investigation: Heifetz and Piatigorsky (now in RCA's 60-disc 'Living Stereo, Vol 2' collection), who somehow manage rather more of a suggested twinkle in the eye, while their pooled tone has a vibrant, 'speaking' quality that Meneses and Cruz don't quite match. Hark back either to Heifetz and Piatigorsky or János Starker and Arnold Eidus (Forgotten Records) for the principal quality that Meneses and Cruz lack, namely individuality. Still, viewed purely from the standpoint of repertoire, it's a fine programme, and Gaspar Cassadó's Suite for solo cello (a product of the 1920s) makes for a pleasing bonus. Excellent notes by Julian Haylock.

Rob Cowan

Liszt

'Symphonic Scenes'

Der nächtliche Zug, S513a. Le triomphe funèbre du Tasse, S517. Salve Polonia, S113 No 2. Three Mephisto Waltzes – S514; S515; S216

Kit Armstrong *pf*

Sony Classical Ⓢ 88875 16373-2 (70' • DDD)



It could be argued that performances of the first and best known of Liszt's *Mephisto Waltzes* by itself are missing half the story, and possibly the more interesting half. Liszt intended the *Two Episodes from Lenau's Faust* as a diptych, and was none too pleased when his commercially minded publisher uncoupled them.

Kit Armstrong's interesting new recording handsomely demonstrates the startlingly rich context given to the *Mephisto Waltz* when heard after the multi-dimensional *Procession by Night*. The Procession here is atmospheric and, in the section built on the 'Pange lingua' chant, affecting in its yearning. Imaginative articulation, pedalling and dynamics conspire to produce that rarity, a *Mephisto Waltz* that is genuinely original while remaining true to the score. The Second and Third *Mephisto Waltzes* are well paced and full of ideas, though without quite achieving the abandon of the First.

Armstrong makes a strong case for the last of the *Trois Odes de funèbre*, 'Le triomphe funèbre du Tasse'. *Salve Polonia*, an excerpt from the unfinished oratorio *St Stanislaus*, on the other hand, loses its way.

Video footage of Armstrong suggests he favours an unusually high position seated at the instrument. This robs his sound of considerable depth, limits its variety and, in some instances, produces a brittle tone. However, this is but a detail in playing that is overall thoughtfully conceived, imaginative and deeply musical. The disc's unusual programming suggests no exact comparisons, but listeners with a taste for Liszt in devilish mode may want to investigate Marco Rapetti's magisterial reading of all four *Mephisto Waltzes*.

Patrick Rucker

Mephisto Waltzes – selected comparison:

Rapetti (DYNA) CDS102

Medtner · Rachmaninov

Medtner Canzona matinata, Op 39 No 4. Skazki (Fairy Tales) – Op 20 No 1; Op 26 No 1; Op 51 No 3. Sonata-Reminiscenza, Op 38 No 1. Sonata tragica, Op 39 No 5. Stimmungsbilder, Op 1 – Prologue **Rachmaninov** Preludes: Op 23 – No 4; No 5; Op 32 – No 5; No 6; No 12; No 13

Yevgeny Sudbin *pf*

BIS Ⓢ BIS1848 (60' • DDD/DSD)



This is a wondrous disc. Yevgeny Sudbin has not been alone in championing the

piano music of Nikolay Medtner: in recent times Marc-André Hamelin, Steven Osborne and Hamish Milne have all brought their special insights into a composer who can perhaps on occasion seem problematic and somehow remote. Sudbin, however, seems to have an exceptional affinity with Medtner's language. He brings both his heart and his head into play when performing these pieces. His head tackles and illuminates textures and harmonies that might seem opaque and knotty on a first study of the scores; his heart is then harnessed to convey the extraordinary sensibility, passion and thoroughly individual cast of melody that courses through the music. As usual with Sudbin's series of BIS discs, he also writes his own booklet-notes in a lucid way that testifies both to his enthusiasm and to his understanding.

'Once you have become mesmerised by the harmonies,' he says, 'time stands still and you are completely absorbed in the moment.' Such is also the feeling that



Two's company: violinist Claudio Cruz joins Antonio Meneses for Kodaly's Duo on the cellist's new disc on Avie

comes over the listener when hearing him play this selection of seven pieces, which – presumably purposely – illustrates the range of emotion that Medtner could distil into his music. There is, for example, the ostensible serenity of the miniature *Fairy Tale*, Op 26 No 1, but it is a serenity in which the smooth surface of the music is ruffled by animated motifs and coloured with strange harmonies and sonorities. As Sudbin says of another *Fairy Tale*, the Op 51 No 3, it becomes 'progressively more interesting as more detail [emerges]. This is a particular trait of Medtner's oeuvre: repeated listening enhances one's appreciation of his music greatly.' The same is true of the *Fairy Tale*, Op 26 No 1, and indeed could be said of all the pieces in Sudbin's set. It is fascinating to follow Medtner's line of thinking through the *Sonata-Reminiscenza* especially when its intriguing contrasts are elucidated with such coherence and spellbinding magic as they are here.

Medtner's natural companion on this disc is his intimate friend, Rachmaninov, from whose Preludes Opp 23 and 32 Sudbin draws six pieces. Even the well-known G minor, Op 23 No 5, comes up with a new exhilaration in Sudbin's hands; the F minor, Op 32 No 6, acquires a terrifying, angered

intensity. But in all six of these preludes Sudbin deploys a luminous spectrum of timbre, a clear interpretative focus and a finely tuned imagination to encapsulate their very essence. **Geoffrey Norris**

Rachmaninov · Scriabin

Rachmaninov Piano Sonata No 1, Op 28

Scriabin Preludes, Op 11

Peter Orth *pf*

Challenge Classics © CC72684 (77' • DDD)



The coupling of Scriabin with Rachmaninov is a particularly interesting

one. Fellow students though they were, their personalities were markedly different, a fact that becomes apparent not only through their music but also through their styles of piano-playing. Rachmaninov's well-intentioned recitals of Scriabin after the latter's death in 1915 sparked criticism that he had failed to understand the airborne qualities of Scriabin's music, and indeed to hear recordings of their playing highlights the contrasts between Rachmaninov's intellectual discipline and Scriabin's wilder impetuosity.

Peter Orth cunningly blurs the boundaries with this disc. Scriabin composed his Op 11 Preludes over a period of years from 1888 to 1896 before his creative thinking had taken its hedonistic, mystical, egocentric course, whereas Rachmaninov's First Sonata dates to his fertile, fully formed maturity around the time of the Second Symphony. Nevertheless, Orth brings out the volatile nature that was always inherent in Scriabin's music. These Preludes might echo Chopin in the sense that there are 24 of them in all the major and minor keys, but Orth shows that the colour of the harmony, the shape of motifs and the weaving of textures have a distinct, pungent character of their own.

Rachmaninov's First Sonata is also presented in its ripe, dramatic intensity, but Orth's performance has a compelling challenger in Nikolay Lugansky's 2012 recording, coupled with the original version of the Second Sonata. Lugansky's interpretation still outshines all others in its appreciation of the sonata's broad sweep of structure, its potent soul and its power of utterance.

Geoffrey Norris

*Rachmaninov – selected comparison:
Lugansky (12/12) (NAIV) AM208*

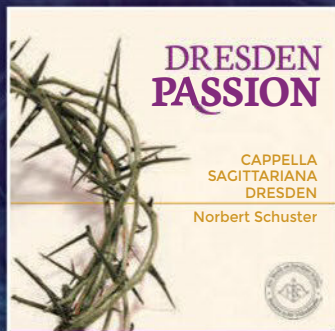
Choral Music and Symphonies from Germany



Johannes Brahms Symphonies

Brandenburgisches Staatsorchester Frankfurt
Howard Griffiths
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- CD Symphonies 3 & 4: rondeau.de/CD/KL1514

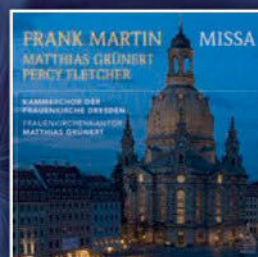
Notations by the conductor and Brahms enthusiast Fritz Steinbach (1855–1916) enabled Howard Griffiths to understand and perform Brahms' Symphonies in a manner consistent with what the composer intended. Griffiths embarks on a thrilling journey and plays the Symphonies as authentically as possible.



Dresden Passion

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Norbert Schuster
rondeau.de/CD/ROP612122

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Frank Martin Missa

Kammerchor der Frauenkirche Dresden
Matthias Grunert
rondeau.de/CD/ROP6111

Martin's Missa meets the works for organ by Percy E. Fletcher: music from two centuries, recorded in the Frauenkirche, which just celebrated the ten-year anniversary of its re-construction.



Johann Rosenmüller Vesper for the Blessed Virgin

Knabenchor Hannover
Jörg Breiding
rondeau.de/CD/ROP701920

With this recording the involved artists revived Johann Rosenmüller's monumental *Vesper For The Blessed Virgin*, which almost fell into oblivion for decades.

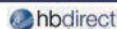


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The Guardian



D Scarlatti

Keyboard Sonatas – Kk8; Kk9; Kk13; Kk27; Kk29; Kk69; Kk87; Kk96; Kk109; Kk113; Kk140; Kk141; Kk159; Kk380; Kk427; Kk430

Angela Hewitt *pf*

Hyperion © CDA67613 (76' • DDD)



This is Angela Hewitt's first foray into Scarlatti on disc but she hopes there

will be more. Sixteen down...539 to go! The ones we have here have been thoughtfully programmed so each is heard to the best advantage. Her booklet-notes are personal and engaging and, as ever, she wears her learning lightly.

With so much experience playing music of the Baroque, you'd expect something highly personal from Hewitt. Even in a sonata as well known as the lilting Kk9, we hear it afresh, with no turn of phrase going unconsidered. In the bustling Kk159, replete with horn calls, she reveals as much interest in the inner parts as in the outer ones.

Comparisons with other pianists are fascinating because they show how many different interpretative approaches these pieces can take. Hewitt's view of Kk69 is relatively spacious, Romantic almost; Anne Queffélec is quite a bit faster here; but then turn to Marcelle Meyer and it's quicker still, with an inevitability to her beautifully moulded lines.

Or try Kk87 in B minor – one of Scarlatti's most poignant sonatas. Hewitt reveals its Palestrina-esque elements, while Pletnev shapes its lines with great freedom. In the same key, Kk27 is one of Scarlatti's greatest sonatas, and Hewitt lays bare every detail, though to my mind Queffélec is the more instinctive musician, though that's true of Sudbin too.

The main issue I have with Hewitt here is that I'm too aware of her musical decision-making, which seems to lie on the surface of her interpretations rather than being concealed. The other caveat is that when Scarlatti is at his most outlandishly demanding, you're too aware of the fact. Repeated notes on the piano are, as Hewitt points out, a nightmare: those in the anarchic Kk141, for instance, are too audibly tricky; Pletnev makes them sound almost annoyingly easy.

Among the less common pieces, Kk140, with its unusual harmonic shifts, sudden silences and fanfares, is a gem and its shifts are well captured by Hewitt. I'm less persuaded by her drawn-out tempo for the profoundly melancholy Kk109, though, as

she says, it's the only one in the 555 marked *Adagio*. And while Kk380, which ends the CD, sounds regal in Hewitt's hands, it acquires a touchingly wistful quality in those of Meyer. **Harriet Smith**

Keyboard Sonatas – selected comparisons:

Meyer (3/86*) (EMI) 568092-2

Queffélec (3/95*) (ERAT) 5046 66988-2

Pletnev (3/96*) (VIRG) 561961-2 or

232281-2 & 928270-2

Sudbin (5/05) (BIS) BIS-CD1508

Vilsmäyr · Biber · Pisendel

Biber Rosary (Mystery) Sonatas – No 16,

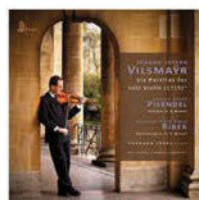
Passacaglia, 'The Guardian Angel'

Pisendel Solo Violin Sonata in A minor

Vilsmäyr Six Solo Violin Partitas

Vaughan Jones *vn*

First Hand (M) ② FHR38 (118' • DDD)



Anyone who listened to Vaughan Jones's 2014 release, 'The Hidden Violin' (7/14),

will know that repertoire rarities don't always produce a winner of an album. To say that Jones's latest two-disc set is a great deal more rewarding is something of an understatement. Yes, it's obscure repertoire once more; but this is music that demands our full attention, presented in such a manner as to ensure that it gets it.

The main event is the first-ever recording of the complete, original set of Six Partitas by Johann Joseph Vilsmäyr, who worked as an increasingly prominent violinist at the Salzburg court between 1689 and his death in 1722. His Partitas, which pre-date those of Bach by at least five years, are challenging polyphonic works, full of double- and triple-stops, arpeggiated chords and implied conversations between musical lines. French and Italian influences are audible, as is that of Austrian folk music, but the take-home point is simply that they're intensely beautiful works that constantly tickle the ear with fresh moods, styles and effects as they dance along. Add the immaculate technical precision and immense musicality of Jones's playing (on a gut-strung modern instrument tuned at A=440kHz and played with a replica snakewood Baroque bow), set it all within the subtly ample acoustic of the church of St Mary Magdalene in Willen, Buckinghamshire, and you have something of a recording triumph which the programme's other two works only build upon.

First, Pisendel's Sonata in A minor. Then, to finish, a story: Biber's *The*

Guardian Angel Sonata, No 16 from the *Mystery Sonatas*, played with a purity, profundity and sense of dramatic architecture that truly stops you in your tracks. Really, bravo. **Charlotte Gardner**

Widor



'Master of the Organ Symphony'

Complete performances of and excerpts from Widor's Organ Symphonies. Three-part documentary on Widor's organ works

Gerard Brooks, Daniel Roth,

Carolyn Shuster Fournier *orgs*

Fugue State Films © ④ (two CDs + two DVDs)

FSFDVDO10 (141' + 4h 57' • DDD • NTSC • 16:9 •

DT5.1 • 0 • s). Played on the organs of the Cathédrale Sainte Croix, Orléans; Saint-Sulpice, Paris; Abbatale Saint-Ouen, Rouen; Saint-Rémy, Selongey; St Michael's Abbey, Farnborough



Widor's 10 organ symphonies have been served well recently. There are splendid complete sets from Joseph

Nolan (Signum; five discs, using a new edition) and Ben van Oosten (MDG), both series recorded on authentic 19th-century French instruments, as well as many other distinguished issues of separate works.

This son of Lyon, born (as he put it) 'in an organ pipe' in 1844, lived such a long, eventful and fruitful life that he really does deserve the five hours of video and 141 minutes of stunning audio-only performances that are on offer here. His life and work are comprehensively related in a three-part documentary, beautifully filmed by Simon Still under the sensitive direction of his Fugue State Films colleague Will Fraser. Those who have purchased their related previous, crowd-funded releases (on César Franck's organ music and the instruments of Aristide Cavallé-Coll) will rejoice in the familiar fastidious craftsmanship and the highest technical and executant standards.

Our primary guide this time is Gerard Brooks, a noted exponent of Romantic French organ repertoire, a distinguished recitalist and sought-after teacher. He gives dramatic (though impeccable) accounts of the Fifth Symphony (in Saint-Ouen, Rouen) and the Sixth (in Orléans Cathedral).

Widor's current successor at St Sulpice in Paris, Daniel Roth, was filmed live on a Sunday morning, during and after a Mass, playing a selection of movements from the other symphonies. The booklet-note advises that 'background sounds' (from the congregation) are audible. Fear not:

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

RETHINKING THE RECITAL

Jed Distler on discs by five pianists who endeavour to break away from traditional notions of programme-planning



Pianist/composer Conrad Tao builds around Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* on his Warner recital

What constitutes a recital? On one hand, we have that tried and true template, where Young International Piano Competition Winner makes Big Debut in a Major Concert Venue, or Famous Established Pianist plays Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin and Brahms. Maybe some Liszt, Debussy, Ravel and Rachmaninov for variety, or a short Schubert piece for charm. The token contemporary work is carefully vetted by committee. The inevitable encore: Chopin's posthumously published C sharp minor Nocturne. Then there's the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* approach to programming. Simply present a Beethoven or Schubert sonata cycle. Play the complete Ligeti Etudes in one programme, or trot out complete books of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Partitas and Suites. You're guaranteed intellectual credibility, not to mention respect from snooty music critics.

Certain artists, however, question conventional notions and assumptions about what a recital should be, preferring instead to explore just what a recital *could* be. They pursue multimedia collaborations and non-traditional venues, and release CDs featuring provocative, conceptual and personal programmes. They lavish lots of time and attention over selection

sequence, not unlike the way DJs mix, match and blend songs, or digital streaming consultants create playlists targeted towards specific audiences. They also pay close attention to sound quality and annotations. All of this represents a growing trend towards pianists as both interpreters and curators, as these five discs bear out.

The young New Zealand pianist **Jason Bae** prefaces his recital with an essay explaining his early obsession with Rachmaninov's music, the impact Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* had on him, and how the Suffolk seaside setting of Britten's *Peter Grimes* taps into his childhood memories of Auckland's beaches. Yet to open with Ronald Stevenson's intricate and virtuosic *Peter Grimes* Fantasy and follow it with Rachmaninov's similarly meaty Second Piano Sonata in its more prolix 1913 version is like serving the main and side dishes before the starters. The fallout resulting from the sonata's large-scale momentum sates your ears and makes it harder to take in Rachmaninov's *Moments musicaux*, let alone Yvar Mikhashoff's dazzling *Portrait of Madama Butterfly*. I propose a more effective reordering of Bae's assured, impassioned performances: the *Moments musicaux*, the *Grimes*, the *Butterfly* and, lastly, the sonata. And what's with the programme's title,

'Marylebone'? Bae offers no explanation and it makes no apparent sense.

By contrast, **Imri Talgam** offers prolix, informative yet rather convoluted booklet-notes explaining his programme devoted to works by Nancarrow, Kagel, Furrer and Stockhausen. Only a cursory listen is required to discover that all of the music is influenced by machines or machine-like devices, or evokes machine-like images. Although two of Conlon Nancarrow's early pieces and his later Canons for Ursula Oppens are scored for human pianist, their dry, hard-hitting sound worlds always bring to mind the composer's trademark player piano. A ticking metronome persists throughout Mauricio Kagel's *MM 51*. At first it annoys, but you eventually get used to it. Beat Furrer's *Voicelessness* offers repeated, obsessive sonorities in slow, quiet motion, while the wild clusters, *glissandos* and jagged outbursts characterising Stockhausen's *Klavierstück X* relate to the composer's early experiments with electronic music. The full-bodied engineering's close, analytical perspective is unforgiving, yet Talgam's proficiency and impressive accuracy survive unscathed.

For his solo debut, **Nicholas Young** focuses on the 20th century's first half with large-scale and pianistically robust works from three wildly contrasting composers. The *Sonata Legend* (*Capricornia*) and *Fantasia Sonata* by Roy Agnew (1891-1944) are brilliantly and idiomatically cast in the late Russian Romantic tradition filtered through York Bowen, Arnold Bax, John Ireland and Agnew's teacher Cyril Scott. Busoni's terse, somewhat dour and foursquare neo-classicism requires more colour and scintillation than Young allows in the Berceuse, Toccata and the 1922 revision of the *Chopin* Variations (the dry recorded sound doesn't help matters). While Young unquestionably commands the alternately stately and playful sides of Elliott Carter's early Sonata with authority and skill, I miss the long-lined shaping and forward impetus distinguishing recordings by Paul Jacobs (Nonesuch, 7/09) and Charles Rosen (the earlier and better of his two – Sony Classical, 12/14), to name but two.

Pianist/composer **Conrad Tao** builds his second Warner Classics release around Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which is preceded by Takemitsu's *Les yeux clos II*, Carter's *Two Thoughts About the Piano* and Tao's own *A Walk (for Emilio)*. Two selections from David Lang's *Memory Pieces* bookend the recital. One doesn't need to know Tao's image-based programme concept in order to glean purely musical

relationships between, say, the marimba-like tremolos of Lang's 'Cage' and those in Mussorgsky's 'Cum mortuis in lingua mortua', or the 'Limoges' marketplace's bustling coda and Carter's fast and furious 'Caténaires'. I also perceive an emotional connection between Takemitsu's gently dissonant, slow-moving chords and the stark, Arvo Pärt-like simplicity of Tao's piece. In spite of his piano's slightly metallic patina, Tao's colouristic gifts come through in the contemporary works. But he doesn't trust Mussorgsky's lack of artifice, and can't help but taper phrases, fuss with dynamics, gratuitously manipulate the basic heartbeat pulse of 'The Old Castle' or plough through the 'Unhatched Chicks' ballet and break all the eggshells in the process.

Finally, **Gilles Vonsattel's** 'Shadowlines' aims to reveal the stylistic and spiritual lineage linking Scarlatti, Messiaen, Webern, George Benjamin and Debussy, and thoroughly succeeds by ordering their works in an organic and musically satisfying progression. The dazzling sheen that Vonsattel brings to the rapid descending scales of Scarlatti's A minor Sonata, Kk3, connects with Debussy darting all over the keyboard throughout 'Feux d'artifice' from the second book of *Préludes*, whose harmonic blurrings relate to the stained-glass harmonies that Messiaen patented early on in his own set of *Préludes*. Likewise, the linear rigour of Webern's Variations take root and alluringly branch out in Benjamin's 'Canonic Preludes' comprising the title selection. In short, Vonsattel's suavely executed and gorgeously engineered programme is better experienced than described. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Various Cpsrs 'Marylebone'
Jason Bae
Austrian Gramophone (P) AG0003



Various Cpsrs Piano Works
Imri Talgam
Solstice (P) SOCD317



Agnew, Busoni, Carter 'Capricornia'
Nicholas Young
Scintillations (P) SCIN1401



Various Cpsrs 'Pictures'
Conrad Tao
Warner Classics (P) 2564 60569-4



Various Cpsrs 'Shadowlines'
Gilles Vonsattel
Honens (P) HONENS201501CD

this simply adds to the evocative ambience and is not a major distraction. It is fascinating to see how Roth teases such coherent and satisfying playing despite the elderly and vulnerable condition of the organ. He is ably assisted at the vast five-manual console by a pair of registrands, complete with 'pace notes', in the manner of rally navigators.

As an unlisted bonus, Roth is filmed in improvisatory mood, during the Mass. He also offers several salient opinions in conversation with one of Widor's biographers, John Near, who is joined by Anne-Isabelle de Parcevaux in providing linking commentaries. Widor's former 1893 salon organ (now transplanted to a frozen Saint-Rémy in Selongey) is put through its paces by a well-wrapped Carolyn Shuster Fournier, and Brooks makes the most of the (seemingly) modest Cavaillé-Coll in St Michael's Abbey, Farnborough.

Although mention is made of Widor's chamber and orchestral scores and his great success as a ballet composer (with *La korrigane* of 1880), this release is primarily focused on his organ music, which accounts for just 10 per cent of his output. The astonishing breadth of his non-musical interests (such as the Institut de France and his responsibilities as permanent secretary of the Académie des Beaux-Arts) are generously covered. Probably the best-connected French composer of his time, he lived long enough to have known Rossini, Liszt, Wagner and Saint-Saëns, as well as encouraging a huge swathe of French compositional pupils including Varèse, Milhaud, Duruflé, Honegger and Messiaen.

His late marriage in 1920 to Mathilde de Montesquiou-Fézensac, at the age of 76, brought him great joy and companionship. Fittingly, the only photographs of him smiling are with his wife. This first-rate production will probably never be bettered.

Malcolm Riley

'Liaisons'

'Re-imagining Sondheim from the Piano'

Songs by Sondheim 'reimagined' by **Andy Akiho, Mason Bates, Eve Beglarian, Derek Bermel, Jherek Bischoff, William Bolcom, Jason Robert Brown, Kenji Bunch, Mary Ellen Childs, Michael Daugherty, Peter Golub, Ricky Ian Gordon, Annie Gosfield, Jake Heggie, Fred Hersch, Ethan Iverson, Gabriel Kahane, Phil Kline, Tania León, Ricardo Lorenz, Anthony de Mare, Wynton Marsalis, Paul Moravec, Nico Muhly, John Musto, Thomas Newman, David Rakowski, Steve Reich, Eric Rockwell, Daniel**

Bernard Roumain, Frederic Rzewski, Rodney Sharman, Duncan Sheik, David Shire, Bernadette Speech, Mark-Anthony Turnage and Nils Vigeland

Anthony de Mare *pf*

ECM New Series (P) 481 1780 (3h 17' • DDD)



In 2007 pianist and new music champion Anthony de Mare launched the Liaisons

Project, for which a wide stylistic and generational gamut of contemporary composers were commissioned to 'reimagine' Stephen Sondheim's songs. The resultant works largely consist of fantasias on Sondheim's melodic lines, harmonies and accompaniments. One might say that the collection presents 21st-century parallels to the operatic paraphrase genre that flourished in the 19th century, most prominently under Franz Liszt.

Three hours and 17 minutes of new music is a lot for listeners to absorb – not to mention a pianist having to learn, perform and record these works to the highest standard, as de Mare undoubtedly does throughout. Although familiarity with Sondheim's original songs might aid one's perception of their 'reimagined' counterparts, it's not really necessary in order to assess each work's individual merit or appeal. It helps that de Mare's running order for each of the three discs ensures effective contrast and flow. As such, I found it best to listen to a disc from beginning to end without referring to titles or the composers' identities, taking notes along the way.

All of the music holds interest, although some selections succeed more than others. The pieces generally fare best when composers remain true to their own stylistic selves and stay focused. Steve Reich's rhythmically complex, tersely communicative two-piano take on 'Finishing the hat' will no doubt take on a life of its own. Both Derek Bermel's 'Sorry/Grateful' and Paul Moravec's 'I think about you' commence with sparse, achingly lyrical lines that give way to increasing musical and emotional complexity (self-indulgence, never). Tania León's 'going...gone' almost unrecognisably recasts the original 'Good thing going' in jagged, carefully constructed lines and paragraphs. In the gently post-minimal 'Perpetual happiness', Eve Beglarian lays out *staccato* repeated notes and sparse chords in just the right proportions, whereas Mason Bates's 'Very

put together' attempts to pack in many notes in many registers with scarcely room to breathe.

By contrast, Jake Heggie transforms 'I'm excited. No you're not.' into a witty, well-crafted, neo-Prokofievian flagwaver, while the declamatory unison utterances and sinewy counterpoint in John Musto's 'Epiphany' and wistful bluesy allusions of Frederic Rzewski's 'I'm still here' exemplify unambiguously real piano-writing. Eric Rockwell's straightforward yet heavy-handed ragtime/piano-bar treatment of 'You could drive a person crazy' pales next to the delicacy and subtle harmonic tinges in Fred Hersch's 'No one is alone', although Mark-Anthony Turnage's spacious and sensitive take on 'Pretty women' was quite the surprise. For that matter, de Mare's own beautifully wrought mini-fantasy on themes from *Sunday in the Park with George* upstages lesser contributions from several highly touted composers and brings this fascinating, excellently produced collection to a fulfilling close.

Jerid Distler

'L'orgue symphonique'

Durufé Suite, Op 5 Roger-Ducasse Pastorale

Vierne Symphony No 2, Op 20

Richard Pinel *org*

Resonus © RES10160 (75' • DDD)

Played on the organ of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle



Richard Pinel's recital celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Harrison & Harrison organ in St George's Chapel, Windsor. It also reflects the vision of Sidney Campbell, the director of music at the time, who ensured that the rebuild reflected his own predilection for Baroque, French Romantic and 20th-century repertoire. Pinel is currently Assistant Director of Music and there can be no doubt of his technical accomplishment – three demanding pieces, not least the five-movement Vierne and the storm section of Roger-Ducasse's *Pastorale*, where the main theme is played in semiquavers on the pedals. He is also an excellent colourist, especially fond of the softer tones – so soft at times that at an average volume level the music is barely audible.

But for all this, there is something missing. And that is drama. Where the music should thrill, it doesn't. Where it should allure, it sounds dutiful. Virgil Fox, for all his faults and hammy presentation,

hits you in the solar plexus with the first movement of Vierne's Symphony No 2 (the Aeolian-Skinner organ of Riverside Church, New York in 1959) on EMI, if you can track it down, a highlight being the central cadenza/*crescendo* over a long pedal A natural (far too prominent from Pinel, as is the similar section in the finale over a pedal A flat). To hear this work in its full Cavaillé-Coll garb, though, turn to Pierre Cochereau in Notre-Dame (Solstice, 2/01) who invests the first and last movements (and the end of the Choral) with a vehement magnificence that St George's can only hint at.

Durufé's popular Suite, Op 5, is played with equal assurance by Pinel but I struggle to equate this and the other performances here with the opinion of *All Music Guide* (quoted on the back cover) that 'With a touch like water over rocks and a tone like the wind through the leaves, Pinel's playing is a force of nature'.

Jeremy Nicholas

'Pollini: De main de maître'

A film by Bruno Monsiegeon

Maurizio Pollini *pf*

DG © DVD 073 5212GH

(54' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • O • s)



Bruno Monsiegeon's reputation precedes him. With films such as *The Enigma* and *Unquiet*

Traveller he has revealed much about artists as temperamentally different as Sviatoslav Richter and Piotr Anderszewski.

Maurizio Pollini shares with these two pianists a fame at the keyboard that is matched by a reticence about all other aspects of his life, and this 54-minute film could equally have been billed 'The Enigma' rather than 'By a Master's Hand'. The blurb on the back of the DVD reads: 'This revealing profile explores Pollini's musical convictions, his adventurous repertoire and strong artistic associations and his deep political commitment.'

All of which promises much. There is some evocative archive footage – of concert life in Milan where Pollini grew up, and the moment he won the 1960 Chopin Competition, aged just 18, including his arrival back in Italy, where he is met off the plane by a bevy of journalists showing an interest that would these days be accorded only to reality TV stars. Pollini incidentally rights an oft-misquoted comment ('Maurizio Pollini plays better than all of us') made by the chairman of the

jury, Arthur Rubinstein: 'What he actually said was "plays technically better than any member of the jury" – I've always thought Rubinstein was just teasing his jury colleagues.' And there are evocative images of Michelangeli, with whom Pollini briefly studied post-Chopin Competition. But we get little more than a glimpse into his family background – a pity given that his architect father was a pioneer of modernism in Italy, while his uncle was the acclaimed sculptor Fausto Melotti.

As for the 'deep political commitment', Pollini rather brushes this off: 'In the 1960s...I had no interest in politics. That dates back to my acquaintance with Luigi Nono, which in turn at that time led me to decide somehow to join the Italian Communist Party. I could do that only because the Communist Party condemned the invasion of Prague by the Soviet army, thereby changing and becoming democratic.' Throughout, his manner remains as formal as his perfectly tailored suit, and he reveals more of himself in concert and rehearsal than in interview, while chatting to his piano tuner, for instance. The excerpts of Pollini at the keyboard – his age guessable through his changing hairstyles – range from youthful Chopin via Beethoven concertos with Karl Böhm to much more recent footage of Stockhausen's *Klavierstück X*.

Towards the end of the film, the discussion turns to Pollini's intentionally restricted repertoire. 'I've always stuck to a basic principle...to include a piece in my repertoire based on the absolute certainty that I will never grow weary of it.' You almost sense Monsiegeon's frustration as he comments: 'There's no Spanish music, no Scarlatti.'

'Scarlatti was a composer of genius like Ravel, whom I seldom play. There are really a lot of marvellous pieces which I've never played, much to my regret.' Monsiegeon suggests that Pollini is perhaps a kind of missionary in the music he plays, a pioneer. 'Absolutely not. I do things for my own pleasure, that's all.'

For all that Pollini is affable and charming, you never feel you're getting closer to the man himself. In this instance, the music itself speaks far louder than mere words.

Harriet Smith

'Solitude'

Blondeau Blackbird Dillon Parjanya-Vata

Lanza La bataille de Caresme et de Charnage^a

Lim Invisibility Saunders Solitude

Séverine Ballon *vc* ^aMark Knoop *pf*

Aeon © AECD1647 (69' • DDD)



Pianist Maurizio Pollini (right) – pictured here with Claudio Abbado and Luigi Nono – is the subject of a new documentary on DG

Mayke Rademakers

JS Bach Six Solo Cello Suites, BWV1007-1012
Britten Tema Sacher **Gubaidulina** Prelude
Kurtág Message-consolation **Penderecki** Per
 Slava **Rademakers** Improvisations - Constant;
 Distant **Schnittke** Klingende Buchstaben
Mayke Rademakers VC

Challenge Classics ® ③ CC72682 (3h • DDD)



We have Pablo Casals most to thank for the cello's renaissance as a solo instrument in the first half of the 20th century, and composers such as Casadó, Reger and Kodály inevitably took their cue from the Solo Suites of Bach, which had remained uncontested as the only significant works composed for the genre in the intervening century and a half.

What Casals would make of the timbral extensions and techniques deployed by the five composers on Séverine Ballon's disc must be left to the imagination, but he would surely admire Ballon's fearless

commitment and her ability to find a distinct expressive world for each of them. He might find a satisfying narrative continuity in *Parjanya-Vata* – not always a quality associated with James Dillon – and he could surely chuckle with admiration at the interventions of artificial birdcalls and sundry percussion in Mauro Lanza's carnivalesque portrait in sound of a battle which lives up to previous depictions in paint and word by Bruegel and Rabelais.

Lanza includes a pianist, whereas the album's title-work by Rebecca Saunders is an interior monologue which, thanks to Ballon's advocacy, seems to bypass the executant and travel deep within the mind and body of the instrument: animated yet left to its own devices, this is surely what a lonely cello would sound like, late at night with a whisky to hand. Liza Lim's 'study in flickering modulations' shimmers between the 12 notes of the chromatic scale with the aid of a second, 'güiro' bow that rasps and grazes between wood and hair, but the *scordatura* tuning serves a more urgent expressive end in Thierry Blondeau's *Blackbird*, building up to the point where the title makes sense – but I wouldn't want to give his game away.

Even though the 20th-century classics for solo cello – most written for Rostropovich – are the most compelling items on Mayke Rademakers's album, they don't make her account of the Cello Suites competitive in an exceptionally crowded market. This is principally down to the Sixth Suite, where she seems hamstrung by using her usual instrument rather than a smaller, five-string cello on which the chords are more naturally spaced. Intonation suffers accordingly, and the double- and triple-stopping is effortfully sustained.

Rademakers does eventually switch to another instrument – an electric cello – for two soulful, multi-movement improvisations which have their roots in dance (bolero, tango, blues, more funky and industrial rhythms too) no less than Bach. The Dutch church acoustic clouds her quicker runs in Bach, whereas she tames the echo with a robust projection worthy of Slava himself in Britten, Schnittke and the rest. **Peter Quantrill**

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Friedrich Cerha

As Vienna's Grand Old Man of music turns 90 on February 17, **Liam Cagney** reflects on Friedrich Cerha's life, influences and work

You could say it reads like the plot of a novel. A young Austrian musician, unwillingly conscripted into the Wehrmacht, deserts; he is caught; later, having deserted for a second time, he makes his way to the Tyrol, where he sees out the war living in a hut and working as a mountain guide before eventually returning to Vienna. This is no fiction, though: it's the wartime experience of Friedrich Cerha. In later years Cerha recalled the 'limitless joy of freedom' he had felt in the Tyrol, removed from the atrocities he had witnessed in combat. It was only much later, he says, that he saw how these traumatic experiences had found subconscious expression in *Spiegel* for orchestra, one of the 20th century's masterpieces.

Cerha's impact on music has been considerable. As well as composing, he has done important work as a conductor (of the Berlin Philharmonic and the Royal Concertgebouw amongst others), teacher (his students include Georg Friedrich Haas), musicologist (creating a complete edition of Berg's *Lulu*) and administrator (Founding Director, in 1958, of the new music ensemble, *die reihe*). Despite this, Cerha is a private man who, says Austrian critic Lothar Knessl, prefers the quiet of home to the bustle of society. That home is Maria-Langegg by the Danube, where, as well as composing, he grows cacti, mushrooms and various flora, and is a skilled stonemason (he designed and built a church there). Cerha remains, however, a Viennese composer through and through.

*In Spiegel's exhilarating freedom of sound
– at times terrifying but always engaging
– there are hints of the Alpine Tyrol*

Born in Vienna in 1926, Cerha was inspired in adolescence by hearing Wagner's *Rienzi* Overture and Strauss's *Salome*, after which he studied violin and composition at the Vienna Academy. In the post-war years, despite the Second Viennese School being a recent memory, the new music scene in the city was non-existent and performances of Webern et al rare. Having got a start with the Austrian branch of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM), Cerha established himself with works such as the neo-serial *Relazioni fragili* (1957-58) for harpsichord and chamber orchestra (premiered with Cerha's wife Traude as soloist), which Ligeti called 'Austria's most important contribution to the music of the 1950s'. But it was the works from the end of that decade that saw Cerha's breakthrough: the three *Mouvements* (1959-60) for chamber orchestra and *Fasce* (1959-74) for orchestra, Cerha's



first sound-mass compositions. Having at Darmstadt become acquainted with John Cage's graphic notation, Cerha used similar notation in *Fasce* to represent events occurring across the orchestra – slow *glissandi*, rippling noises and group trajectories, the compositional onus moving away from pitches towards groups of sounds.

This approach reached its apex in *Spiegel* (1959-61) for orchestra, a cycle of seven works. Motivic-developmental and neo-serial approaches are here abandoned in favour of sound states undergoing processes of slow transformation, interspersed with unexpected, 'non-linear' events. As Cerha notes, this is music without 'melody, harmony and rhythm in the traditional sense'. A key influence, he says, was Norbert Wiener's theory of cybernetics: 'I began to regard a piece of music as just such a system with various elements influencing, hindering, disturbing and deactivating each other: processes for which the overarching system attempts to compensate in order to re-establish equilibrium.' If this sounds formalistic, in reality it is highly dramatic, and in *Spiegel's* exhilarating freedom of sound – at times terrifying but always engaging – there are hints of the Alpine Tyrol and of late-Romantic tone-poems. Of *Spiegel III*, for example – a drifting cluster of brass and winds – Cerha comments: 'Without my nature experiences in the mountains, and also later on at sea, I would probably not have discovered it,' adding that he regards it as a 'Mediterranean "sea piece"'. Comparisons with Ligeti's orchestral music come readily. Yet Ligeti said that when he and Cerha showed each other their respective scores for *Spiegel* and *Apparitions*, each was



CERHA FACTS

Born Vienna, February 17, 1926

Education Music studies at the Vienna Music Academy. Philosophy and German studies at the University of Vienna (DPhil 1950). Darmstadt Summer Courses in 1956, 1958 and 1959

1958 Founds ensemble die reihe with Kurt Schwerstik

1959 Commences *Spiegel*. Appointed at the Vienna Academy

1962 Invited by Universal Edition to complete Berg's *Lulu*

1972 First complete performance of *Spiegel*

1979 Premiere of full version of *Lulu* in Paris. Performance of *Spiegel* at the Venice Biennale

1981 Premiere of *Baal* in Salzburg; premiere of *Netzwerk* in Vienna; conducts *Lulu* in Graz

1986 Receives the Austrian Staatspreis

1994 Made inaugural president of Klangforum Wien

2012 Awarded the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize

surprised to discover that, unbeknown to the other, he had been composing in a

similar style. The first part of *Spiegel* to be performed in Cerha's native country was *Spiegel IV* in 1971 in Graz, 10 years after the cycle's composition; this was followed by the full cycle in Graz the following year. Since then, its reputation has grown: Brian Ferneyhough, for example, calls it a 'standard-setting piece of orchestral music' and Helmut Lachenmann a 'prophetic' work – the latter hard to deny, given *Spiegel*'s similarities to the spectral music of Tristan Murail and his French colleagues.

After this Cerha drew back, developing his musical style and engaging in more self-effacing activity, such as focusing on his new-music ensemble. If in the 1950s new music was seldom heard in Austria, die reihe changed that. A key problem had been that performances of new music were sporadic; die reihe's name (which Ligeti came up with, meaning 'The Row' or 'The Series') was accordingly meant to signify not Schoenberg's 12-tone method but rather a regular presence by which the listening public would be able to become familiar with new music. The first concert by die reihe saw Webern programmed alongside Austrian premieres of Pousseur and Boulez. In the following decade the ensemble had its share of scandals – the Austrian premiere of Cage's Piano Concerto, with David Tudor as soloist, caused uproar – and notable commissions, such as Ligeti's Chamber Concerto (1969-70). Cerha continued with die reihe until the 1980s, and the ensemble, which still performs, set a template for the Austrian chamber orchestra Klangforum Wien.

In 1962, Universal Edition commissioned Cerha to create a performable version of the incomplete Third Act of

Berg's *Lulu*. The project took him more than a decade. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this period also saw Cerha shift towards both a more orthodox, Bergian post-tonal style (for instance, in the Double Concerto for Violin and Cello, 1976) and the composition of operas and music theatre, including *Baal*, *Netzwerk*, *Rattenfänger* and *Der Riese vom Steinfeld*. Always interested in drama, Cerha had initially wanted *Spiegel* to be a 'world theatre' featuring actors and scenography. This idea was subsequently realised in the *Exercises* cycle (1962-67) for baritone, speakers and chamber orchestra and in *Netzwerk* (1981) for singers, speakers, actors and orchestra. Cerha's first opera *Baal* (1974-80) is more traditional. Based on the eponymous play by Bertold Brecht, which probes the tension between the individualism of the artist and the claims of society, critics naturally saw a kinship with Berg's outsider protagonists; however, *Baal* deserves to be regarded on its own terms. Musically, it mostly abandons Cerha's sound-mass style in favour of a more orthodox, post-tonal discourse; though closer listening shows a certain consistency with the process logic of *Spiegel* in the way *Baal* incorporates different styles via a 'network' form.

The 1981 premieres of *Baal* and *Netzwerk* saw Cerha's 'arrival' in Austria's cultural establishment, a status recognised with the award of the State Prize in 1986. In recent years, as well as the above-mentioned operas, Cerha has often composed in traditional genres: the *Requiem für Hollensteiner* (1983, with a text based on Thomas Bernhard's *Geben*), the String Quartets 1 (1989), 2 (1989-90) and 3 (1991-92, all recorded by the Arditti Quartet), concertos for violin (1993), cello (1989/97), saxophone (2003-4), and percussion (2007-8), and numerous chamber works.

Cerha still remains ill-served on CD, however, and several of his key works have never been widely released other than on an out-of-print 12-CD set released on the Austrian Radio's Zeitton label. Cerha's 90th birthday year should hopefully see this rectified, giving listeners the chance to fully appreciate this venerable Viennese composer's musical achievements. ⑥

DISCOVERING FRIEDRICH CERHA

Large- and small-scale music from the Viennese master

**Spiegel. Monumentum. Momente**

SWR Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden and Freiburg / Sylvain Cambreling; ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra Vienna / Dennis Russell Davis, Friedrich Cerha
Kairos (A/10)

Spiegel is avant-garde yet highly involving: once enveloped in its soundworld, you'll want to keep listening until the end.

**Baal Gesänge**

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau; Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Kurt Masur
Berlin Classics

Cerha's vocal music is unfortunately under-represented on disc, but this collection, sung by Fischer-Dieskau, gives an impression of his first opera *Baal*.

**'Chamber Music with Clarinet'**

Arcus Ensemble Vienna; Hugo Wolf Quartett
Neos

Cerha's Viennese predecessors jostle with Satie's sparseness and Messiaen's modality in these pensive chamber works with clarinet from 2000 and after.

Vocal



Lindsay Kemp on John Eliot Gardiner's new Monteverdi DVD:

'Gardiner has always liked his Vespers punchy, theatrical and without a hint of English churchiness.' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 75**



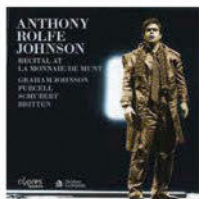
Richard Wigmore listens to Jon Vickers's compelling Winterreise:

'Has any singer, I wonder, ever drawn out the climactic 'Wein' in 'Letzte Hoffnung' to such masochistic lengths?' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**

Britten • Purcell • Schubert

Britten *Winter Words*, Op 52. The Birds. Oliver Cromwell. O waly, waly **Purcell** Alleluia. In the black dismal dungeon of despair, Z190. Thou wakeful shepherd that dost Israel keep (A Morning Hymn), Z198. We sing to him, whose wisdom form'd the ear, Z199 **Schubert** Alinde, D904. An die Laute D905. Erlkönig, D328. Die frühen Gräbe, D290. Klage an den Mond, D436. Die Sommernacht, D289. Der Vater mit dem Kind, D906. Vor meiner Wiege, D927. Der Winterabend, D938

Anthony Rolfe Johnson *ten* **Graham Johnson** *pf*
Cypres Archive © CYP8607 (72' • DDD • T)
Recorded live at La Monnaie, Brussels, June 21, 1996



We are lucky that Anthony Rolfe Johnson left such a durable legacy of

recordings, but new additions are still welcome. This live recital from the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels dates from 1996, placing it in the last years of his career as a singer. Apart from some strain when he is singing with full force, he is in good voice, that plangent beauty of tone which was his trademark much in evidence.

The introductory Purcell group is performed in Britten's familiar arrangements, though the tenor's warmth of tone and an absence of spiky modernism in Graham Johnson's accompaniments make them sound less edgy than usual (the celebrated 'In the black dismal dungeon of despair' touches real depths of feeling). His Schubert group, including 'Alinde' and the heavenly 'Der Winterabend', is mostly lyrical in mood and sensitively sung. It comes as a surprise when 'Erlkönig' jumps out halfway through, and Rolfe Johnson works up a rush of intensity at the climax with his accompanist gamely at his heels.

As always in his Britten, lyrical beauty and an eloquent way with the English language inform a heartfelt performance of *Winter Words*. Then there are three Britten folksongs to finish, presumably his encores.

'O waly, waly' is sung with a soft intimacy that must have left the Brussels audience hardly daring to breathe.

Rolfe Johnson's studio recording of *Winter Words* on Hyperion is already a favourite but this one – more immediate, less subtly poetic – makes a worthwhile alternative. The recording places singer and pianist quite close. This, together with some breathless editing between songs, means that little audience noise gets through, though what sounds like accidental banging of the microphone is picked up on and off. Here was a fine night to have been at La Monnaie. It is one worth remembering. **Richard Fairman**

Winter Words – selected comparison:

Rolfe Johnson, Johnson (3/87, 5/90) (HYPE) CDH55067

Dukas

'Cantates, chœurs et musique symphonique'
Les Sirènes. La fête des myrtes. Sémélé. Pensée des morts. Hymne au soleil. L'Ondine et le Pêcheur. Cantate Velleda. Polyeucte. Villanelle
Marianne Fiset, Catherine Hunold, Chantal Santon-Jeffery *sops* **Kate Aldrich, Marie Kalinine** *mezs* **Frédéric Antoun, Cyrille Dubois** *tens* **Tassis Christoyannis** *bar* **Andrew Foster-Williams** *bass-bar* **Hans van der Zanden** *hn* **Flemish Radio Choir; Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra / Hervé Niquet**
Ediciones Singulares © ② ES1021 (102' • DDD • T/t)



The latest release in Palazetto Bru Zane's Prix de Rome series focuses on Paul Dukas, music's ultimate perfectionist, whose experience of the competition, like that of so many composers, was fraught with tension and frustration. The set casts its net wider, however, than his submitted entries, by including the early orchestral mélodie *L'Ondine et le Pêcheur*, together with two of the very few works he published in his lifetime; the 1892 overture *Polyeucte* and the 1906 *Villanelle* for horn, originally with piano but given here in an orchestration by his pupil Odette Metzner, a quiet reminder of Dukas's importance as a teacher later in life.

A student at the Paris Conservatoire from 1881, Dukas entered the competition annually between 1886 and 1889, each time submitting the prescribed short work for chorus and orchestra, which, if accepted, permitted entry to the second round, where the final outcome was judged on the composition of a dramatic cantata. There was no choice of subject, and one of the competition's limitations was that composers were saddled with prescribed texts, often of mediocre quality. Only the 1886 choral entry, *Pensée des morts*, to a poem by Alphonse de Lamartine, gave Dukas the opportunity to set a major French writer, and he responded with a quiet elegy, graced by closely woven polyphony and an exquisite *a cappella* passage at its close. Its immediate successors, the Classical *La fête des myrtes* (1887) and the Orientalist *Hymne au soleil* (1888) are foursquare and pompous in comparison. Dukas may well have been tempering his style to suit his judges, however. *L'Ondine et le Pêcheur*, written when he was only 19 to a poem by Théophile Gautier on a variant of the Lorelei legend, is more original than all three. Its swaying vocal line, slithering harmonies and extraordinary orchestration, which weaves saxophones, piano and glockenspiel into the diaphanous textures, pre-empts much of his later music.

Hymne au soleil, however, caught the judges' attention. Dukas's first cantata, *Velleda*, takes its subject from Chateaubriand's 1809 epic *Les martyrs* (a source for Bellini's *Norma*), dealing with the catastrophic affair between the Druid priestess Velleda and Eudore, a Roman army officer. The text is dreadful: Chateaubriand would probably have turned in his grave at Velleda's opening gambit, 'Je suis la fée aux ailes d'or'. But the piece itself, structured round a pastoral opening, an agitated central love duet and an intense final trio with Velleda's appalling father Ségenax, displays considerable dramatic power. Dukas was awarded second place, and bitterly disappointed.



Hervé Niquet in the studio with the Brussels Philharmonic and Flemish Radio Choir: their new recording features rare works by Paul Dukas

The 1889 competition, however, provoked a crisis. In both his pieces, Dukas brought his admiration for Wagner controversially to the fore. The choral *Sirènes* owes much to the *Götterdämmerung* Rhinemaidens. *Sémélé*, the second-round cantata, is again tightly focused despite a problematic text, and the score blends Wagnerism with classical restraint. A *Walküre*-ish storm evokes Juno's implacable jealousy while a reiterated brass monotone, like Hunding's horn call, tracks her errant husband down. The vocal writing, however, has a sculpted loftiness that peers back through Berlioz towards Gluck. The resulting amalgam is startling, though the judges dismissed it out of hand. Dukas left the Conservatoire in disgust, believing he was the victim of anti-Wagnerian discrimination. The brooding *Polyeucte*, his first work as an independent composer, is the most overtly Wagnerian of his scores.

Hervé Niquet and his forces are superb guides through this repertoire, little of which has previously appeared on disc, apart from the comparatively familiar *Villanelle* and François-Xavier Roth's 2013 recordings of *Velléda* and *Polyeucte* (Actes Sud Musicales, 3/14). Orchestral textures are admirably lucid, the choral singing

beautifully focused and the conducting impeccable, though *La fête des myrtes* and *Hymne au soleil* could be a bit more brash. *Sémélé* gets a terrific, high-voltage performance, blazingly sung by Catherine Hunold (*Sémélé*), Kate Aldrich (Juno) and Tassis Christoyannis (Jupiter). *Velléda* is altogether more measured: Frédéric Antoun is the lyrically passionate Eudore, opposite Marianne Fiset's occasionally shrill Velléda and Andrew Foster-Williams's bluff Ségenax. Chantal Santon-Jeffery does exquisite things with *L'Ondine et le Pêcheur*, which really deserves to be heard more often. The whole thing adds immeasurably to our understanding of Dukas and is a very fine achievement indeed. **Tim Ashley**

Handel

'Duetti e terzetti italiani'

Amore gioie mi porge, HWV180. Caro autor di mia doglia, HWV182a. Che vai pensando, folle pensier, HWV184. Giù nei tartarei regni, HWV187. Quando in calma ride il mare, HWV191. Quel fior che all'alba ride, HWV200. Se tu non lasci amore, HWV201. Tacete, ohimè, tacete, HWV196. Va, speme infida, HWV199

Roberta Invernizzi, Silvia Frigato *sops*

Krystian Adam *ten* **Thomas Bauer** *bar*

La Risonanza / Fabio Bonizzoni

Glossa © GCD921517 (61' • DDD • T/t)



These seldom-recorded duets and trios are masterpieces of miniature form.

La Risonanza's latest Handelian foray includes a sublime rendition of the rarely performed *Caro autor di mia doglia*, perhaps written for Florence in 1707; it is the only one of his chamber duets for the distinctive combination of soprano (the plangent Roberta Invernizzi) and tenor (the mellifluous Krystian Adam). Likewise, the four duets for soprano and bass have hitherto received scant attention from musicians: Thomas Bauer is partnered by Invernizzi and Silvia Frigato in half each respectively. *Tacete, ohimè, tacete* contains a sublime evocation of Cupid sleeping. The chamber singing of all participants has pinpoint accuracy, refined poise and poetic expressiveness; there is a pleasing hint of teasing wistfulness between Bauer and Frigato in the gently affectionate *Che vai pensando, folle pensier*. In livelier passages Invernizzi occasionally exaggerates a little too much for such intimately conversational music, but the two sopranos combine rapturously

in *Amore gioie mi porge*, which ends with an extraordinary chromatic depiction of a suffering lover's misery.

The duets are flanked by both of Handel's chamber trios for two sopranos and bass. The D minor contrapuntal conclusion *Quel fior che all'alba ride* (HWV200) offers a vanitas moral that life is like a beautiful flower that wilts and loses its springtime (Handel recalled its musical material for a solemn chorus in *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*). The only one of these pieces that Handel dated is the bittersweet trio *Se tu non lasci amore*, composed at Naples on July 12, 1708 – so it is exactly contemporary to the serenata *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo*.

Continuo accompaniments are realised with exquisite subtlety by Caterina dell'Agnello (cello), Evangelina Mascardi (theorbo) and Fabio Bonizzoni (harpsichord). Beaming a searchlight into the darkest and furthest corners of Handel's youthful Italian-period creations, these sage performances are essential fare.

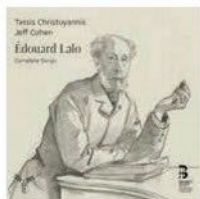
David Vickers

Lalo

'Complete Songs'

Tassis Christoyannis bar Jeff Cohen pf

Aparté © ② AP110 (130' • DDD • T/t)



Édouard Lalo wrote some 23 songs between 1848 and 1887, a significant

contribution to his smallish but invariably distinguished output. Very few have appeared on CD, however, so this fine complete set from Tassis Christoyannis and Jeff Cohen fills a major gap in Lalo's discography. It allows us to assess and reassess the songs themselves, while the chronological presentation affords significant insights into the development of a composer of great originality, whose reputation still suffers from charges of idiosyncrasy.

His early songs, occupying the whole of the first disc and mostly designated 'scènes' or 'romances' rather than 'mélodies', are experimental by nature, grand in scale and occasionally discursive. 'Adieu au désert' and 'Le novice', portraits of a Muslim warrior and a renegade monk respectively, are essentially dramatic cantatas, combining recitative and arioso, not always ideally successfully. More impressive are the *Six Romances populaires de Pierre-Jean Béranger* of 1849, a lengthy (44 minutes) sequence of strophic ballads, some with accompaniments in variation

form, to texts by the iconic poet of the 1830 revolution: their combination of social concern, angry wit and sentimentality reveals a fierce political conscience, the intensity of which was to wane as Lalo's career progressed.

When we get to the 1856 Victor Hugo set that opens the second disc, however, a marked shift is discernible. There is a gravitation towards high-Romantic poetry. The tone varies and lightens, becoming intimate and sexual. Accompaniments become more transparent as Lalo turns towards shorter forms. His expressive range and subtlety deepened further after 1865, the year he married the Breton contralto Julie Bernier de Maligny, for whom many of his later songs were written. The wonderful de Musset settings of 1870 are exquisitely sensual, though politics resurfaces in the background of the central 'Chanson de Barberine', where the departure for the battlefield of the heroine's soldier lover hints at French losses in the Franco-Prussian war. His last songs, written in the 1880s contemporaneously with *Le roi d'Ys*, share both its absolute conciseness and its debt to Breton folk music. It's an impressive body of work, and there seems no reason, apart from ignorance, why the best of it is heard so infrequently.

The close recording occasionally catches a pulse in Christoyannis's tone, and he struggles a bit with the immense vocal span of 'Adieu au désert'. But he is an outstanding communicator here, admirably aware of textual and musical subtleties, without over-dramatising. The Hugo settings gleam with wit. The fragile eroticism of the de Musset set is beautifully done, and his tender way with the last songs is extraordinarily moving. Cohen is a fine accompanist, weighty yet detailed, formidably coming into his own in the Béranger *Romances*, where the complex piano-writing carries the primary emotional meaning. I would have preferred more detailed booklet-notes than those provided, but this is a superb issue nevertheless. It's essential listening if you care for French song. **Tim Ashley**

Lassus

'Biographie musicale, Vol 5 - Lassus l'Européen'

A ce matin. Come la cera al foco.

Concupiscendo concupiscit. Creator omnium Deus. Cum invocarem exaudivit me. Deus misereatur nostri. Domine, quid multiplicati sunt. Ecce Maria genuit nobis. En m'oyant chanter. Exaltabo te Domine. Heu mihi Domine. Maria voll Genad. O d'amarissime onde. O doux parler. O Lucia, miau miau. Quand me souvient. Quid prodest stulto.

Quis valet eloquio. Sur tous regretz. Tritt auff den Rigel von der Thür

Vox Luminis / Lionel Meunier

Musique en Wallonie © MEW1579 (61' • DDD • T/t)



For this final instalment in its multinational Lassus series, Musique en

Wallonie turns to the *Gramophone* Award-winning ensemble Vox Luminis. The 'mélange' format, mixing pieces of various genres and formats, was well known to Lassus's publishers and their public. The risk in recital (in common with the other discs in the series) is that the given ensemble shows itself more adept at certain genres than others, but because Vox Luminis are particularly adaptable, they largely avoid this pitfall.

Equally, what works and what doesn't is a matter of personal taste. To mine, the choral approach adopted for most of the motets doesn't really suit Lassus. The ensemble seem far more focused with a single voice to a part than with several, and they sound better still when doubled by an organ, as in *Deus misereatur nostri* and *Domine, quid multiplicati sunt*, both of which work wonderfully. The handful of French chansons are perhaps the most successful grouping altogether: Vox Luminis capture Lassus's restrained melancholy very well (*Sur tous regretz* is particularly fine), but seem less assured when the text turns jocular or louche.

The curate's-egg principle also applies to the Italian pieces: the smutty, Neapolitan-inspired *O Lucia* is dispatched with real verve but the more serious madrigals are nearly indistinguishable from the motets. The German selections are perhaps more uniformly successful: the playful suggestiveness of *Tritt auff* is nicely captured.

Finally, each disc of this set includes at least one example of whimsy that is peculiar to Lassus: here, *Quid prodest stulto* reflects on earthly folly to the recurring motif 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'. The decision to assign the ostinato to a single louder voice is an individual touch, though it draws attention away from the melodic incident in the other voices, which is particularly detailed. Vox Luminis don't quite match the superlative levels achieved in later repertoires but their best performances here are highlights of the set as a whole.

Fabrice Fitch

Martin • Fletcher • Grünert

Fletcher Festival Offertorium. Fountain

Reverie. Festival Toccata **Grünert** Agnus

Dei. Pater noster **Martin** Missa

Chamber Choir of the Fraeunkirche, Dresden /

Matthias Grünert *org*

Rondeau Production © ROP6111 (55' • DDD • T)



Released to mark the 10th anniversary of the Frauenkirche's reconsecration, this

album effectively functions as a showcase for the talents of its music director, 42-year-old Matthias Grünert, as a composer, organist, choir trainer and conductor.

Percy Fletcher's *Festival Toccata* will be familiar to organists as a recession after the fashion of Mulet and Lefébure-Wély, and the *Fountain Reverie* is no less demanding of an organist's smooth *legato* (hidden in the haze of arpeggiated semiquavers is a blurry vision of Liszt's *Villa d'Este*). The protractedly sub-Franckian sequences of the *Festival Offertorium* make a sterner test of this listener's patience, but Grünert is a bravura performer, recorded close enough that the lightning stands out from Fletcher's Edwardian thunder.

The Frauenkirche Chamber Choir are set more distantly from the microphones in the eight-part polyphony of Martin's Mass but their 40 or so members overcome this disadvantage with relaxed, alert singing that uses the building to their advantage, not pushing the sound but letting it bloom with discreetly placed consonants and minimal vibrato. The Bavarian Radio Choir under Peter Dijkstra in Munich may be more professionally honed, but for all its complexity the Mass was not written for soloistic voices. Grünert makes no concessions to the acoustic in terms of tempo; only in the upper stretches of the *Credo* and in his own strenuously expressive setting of *Pater noster* do the sopranos reveal frailty. Were the Mass placed in a more commercially astute context, the album would challenge the likes of Westminster Cathedral and the RIAS Chamber Choir. Anyone with fond memories of Dresden need not hesitate.

Peter Quantrill

Martin – selected comparisons:

Westminster Cath Ch, O'Donnell
(3/98) (HYPE) CDA67017

RIAS Chbr Ch, Reuss

(8/04^R) (HARM) HMA195 1834

Bavarian Rad Chor, Dijkstra (BRKL) 900500



Tassis Christoyannis: making Lalo essential listening in his survey of the composer's songs

Mayr

Requiem

Siri Karoline Thornhill, Katharina Ruckgaber *sops*

Theresa Holzhauser, Brigitte Thoma *contrs*

Markus Schäfer, Robert Sellier *tens* **Martin Berner,**

Ludwig Mittelhammer, Virgil Mischok *basses*

Simon Mayr Chorus and Ensemble / Franz Hauk

Naxos © ② 8 573419/20 (116' • DDD)



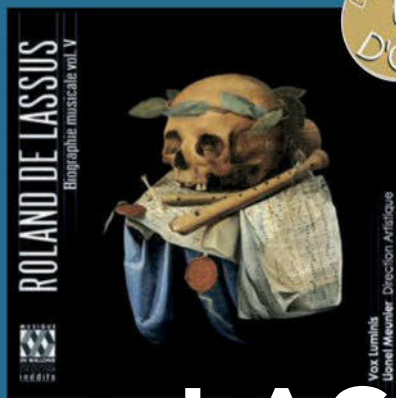
German-born but Italian trained, Simon Mayr was in his early fifties when he turned

in earnest to the composition of sacred music. Among his many offerings are six Requiems, 20 Requiem movements and no fewer than 111 pieces for the Office of the Dead. Based in Bergamo, just north of Milan, he was clearly the go-to man when it came to the provision of musical obsequies for the great and the good of Lombardy.

A Requiem Mass by him, published in Milan in 1819, has long been known about. This new recording offers us a rather more lavishly appointed setting, probably written for an event in Bergamo four years earlier. Made up of 22 separate movements, it has been assembled from 12 previously unexamined manuscripts – two of them the work of Mayr's pupil Donizetti – which are currently housed in Bergamo's Civico Biblioteca Angelo Mai.

Since it was the irresistible rise of Rossini that largely put paid to Mayr's operatic career, it is interesting to note that when Ferdinand Hiller asked Rossini about Mayr's 'powers of invention' in 1855, Rossini deftly sidestepped the question, preferring instead to praise Mayr's skills as an orchestrator and his role as 'the first Italian composer to show to advantage the dramatic dimension'.

That might well have been the case in the theatre (Rossini much admired Mayr's

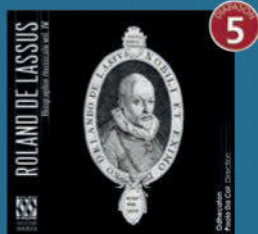


Vol. V: Lasso
the European

Vox Luminis
Lionel Meunier
(dir.)

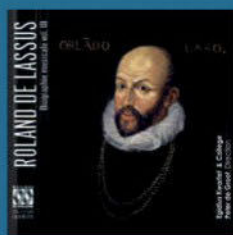
LESSO

a musical biography



Vol. IV: The last years

Odhecaton
Paolo Da Col (dir.)



Vol. III: Bavaria, the time of
conflicts

Egidius Kwartet & College
Peter de Groot (dir.)



Vol. II: Bavaria, the time of
favor

Singer Pur



Vol. I: Youth

Ludus Modalis
Bruno Boterf (dir.)

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Medea in Corinto) but it's certainly not the case with this treatment of the Requiem text. Almost entirely bereft of serious engagement with the drama of Last Things, it reveals Mayr burbling away, as was often his wont, amiably and at length. A more irrepressibly cheerful set of Requiem movements you would be hard-pressed to find.

A more contemplative mood does occasionally break in, as in the soprano's lovely 'Quid sum miser' or the tenor-led 'Preces meae', though the latter is Donizetti's work, not Mayr's. (Would one have guessed? The lie and shape of the vocal line is a possible clue.) There are times too when Mayr suddenly remembers his Mozart, which helps.

What is genuinely cheering about the set is the affection that Franz Hauk and his mainly Bavarian forces clearly have for the music of their fellow countryman. The performance has style and panache, and the recording is first-rate. **Richard Osborne**

Monteverdi



Vespro della Beata Vergine

Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists /
Sir John Eliot Gardiner

Alpha ② (DVD + Blu-ray) ALPHA705 (105' • NTSC •
16:9 • DD5.1 & PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Chapelle Royale, Versailles,
March 9, 2014



There is a celebratory atmosphere to this *Vespers*, recorded at a concert in the Royal Chapel at Versailles.

And why not? As the booklet accidentally-almost reveals, it came four days after a similar concert in King's College, Cambridge, which had marked the exact 50th anniversary of Sir John Eliot Gardiner's famous performance of it there on March 5, 1964 – the first-ever appearance of the Monteverdi Choir. Good reason for its conductor to be in a benign mood, then, and so indeed he appears, smiling at his singers and players, and oozing visible pleasure at their most beautiful contributions.

Gardiner has always liked his *Vespers* punchy, theatrical and without a hint of English churchiness. His 1989 recording in St Mark's, Venice (also on DVD – Archiv, 5/03), perhaps showed us the extreme end of that approach, and while he has undoubtedly mellowed since then, the basic idea remains. A big breath for the solo singer between the very first two words of the opening Responsorium offers the earliest possible hint that this performance

will be both expansive and indulgent, and sure enough the choir's big moments – that opening, the 'omnes' intervention in the 'Audi coelum' and the close of the *Magnificat* – really are big. But it is not all about being grand; the virtuosity of Gardiner's 30-strong choir allows him to shape the psalm movements like richly upholstered madrigals, chiselling out contrasts between very loud and very quiet, varying the pace at will and really pushing at the text (listen to the quickness with which they accelerate on the words 'suscitans, suscitans' in the 'Laudate pueri'). There are also some wonderfully smooth moments ('Ave maris stella') and some drawn-out endings, and it is a mark of Gardiner's experience with this piece that he can do all these and still maintain compelling momentum. There are exquisite solos too, especially from soprano Silvia Frigato and tenor Nicholas Mulroy.

This was originally a live TV broadcast, so the filming is truly in-the-moment (you can sometimes see musicians and cameramen on the move), but the simplicity of it brings an integrity to the whole that is not quite there in the 1989 DVD. And if the architecture of the Chapelle Royale seems a little massive even for Gardiner's concept of this piece, the shot of its decorated ceiling while invisible tenors call to each other in the dizzying 'Duo Seraphim' is as moving and theatrical a moment as anything. **Lindsay Kemp**

Pärt

The Beatitudes^a. Berliner Messe^a. Cantate Domino^a. Annum per annum^b. Mein Weg hat Gipfel und Wellentäler^b. Pari intervallo^b. Trivium^b. Spiegel im Spiegel^b

^bThomas Leech *org* ^aLeeds Cathedral Choir /
Benjamin Saunders with ^aDaniel Justin *org*
Brilliant ② 94960 (80' • DDD • T/t)



This highly impressive disc features a selection of Pärt's choral music and his complete output for organ, somewhat oddly programmed in two groups rather than in alternation. What makes the recording special is the full-throated sound of the choir, featuring both boy and girl trebles, captured in the spacious acoustics of Leeds Cathedral itself. This means that the composer's work here acquires a clearly liturgical dimension (something frequently implicit in his music but not always evident in recordings by concert choirs), and the sound of the trebles plays no small part in this. Pärt's beautiful

setting of *The Beatitudes*, dating from 1990, opens the disc, and it is followed by the *Berliner Messe* from the same year, which benefits particularly from the choir's understanding of the music's liturgical context and Benjamin Saunders's fluid shaping of it. A sprightly performance of the early *Cantate Domino* follows, and again, the sound of the choir suggests another association, this time with Christmas carols, something that has certainly never occurred to this reviewer before.

The organist accompanying the choral works is Daniel Justin; the solo organ pieces are played by Thomas Leech, who has a clear empathy for the composer's frequently somewhat idiosyncratic writing for the instrument; as the anonymous booklet-notes eloquently observe, these works 'explore [exploit?] the instrument's capacity for stasis and to extract meaning from minimal resources – expressive states so much organ repertoire attempts to cover at all costs'. Such is certainly an apt description for the substantial *Annum per annum*, whose length makes maintaining a sense of musical narrative a real challenge. The same can be said too for Leech's outstanding performance of the somewhat impenetrable *Mein Weg hat Gipfel und Wellentäler*.

Pärt would no doubt be surprised to learn of his 'deep Catholicism' as the notes have it, since he is a Russian Orthodox believer, but I have no doubt that these performances, stemming as they do from a living Roman Catholic liturgical context, would meet with his unqualified approval.

Ivan Moody

Rosenmüller

Vespro della Beata Maria Vergine

Hanover Boys' Choir; Johann Rosenmüller
Ensemble; L'Arco Baroque Orchestra /
Jörg Breiding

Rondeau Production ② ROP7019/20
(115' • DDD • T/t)



In the early 1650s Johann Rosenmüller was promised that he would become the next Thomaskantor, but this plan was scuppered when he was thrown into a Leipzig gaol as part of an investigation into alleged pederasty. He escaped and found refuge in Venice for about 25 years, finding work as a trombonist and composer at St Mark's, and sometimes working as *maestro di coro* at the Ospedale della Pietà. It seems he returned to his homeland in 1682 when he was appointed Hofkapellmeister at Wolfenbüttel,

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

LIEDER AND FOLLOWERS

Richard Wigmore listens to a clutch of German song discs that venture well beyond the obvious



Christian Elsner and Marek Janowski perform orchestrations of Schubert's songs

What would one give to eavesdrop on the world's first great Lieder duos: Franz Schubert in tandem with his two favoured interpreters, Johann Michael Vogl and Baron Carl von Schönstein? According to a mutual friend, the collaborations between Schubert and Vogl could provoke 'friendly controversy'. Rooted in 18th-century Italian opera, the singer was lavish with so-called *Manieren* – variations in the vocal line on repeats, and added ornamentation. Schubert apparently tolerated this interpretative freedom from both Vogl and Schönstein – though only up to a point.

The Baron's handwritten changes and embellishments in his own copy of *Die schöne Müllerin*, many of which appeared in a subsequent edition by Diabelli, suggest how the songs were performed in 19th-century salons. Several recent singers, notably Christoph

Prégardien (Challenge Classics, 8/08), have followed suit. **Markus Schäfer** and fortepianist Tobias Koch go several stages further. 'Am Feierabend' ends with mini-cadenzas for voice and keyboard; the keyboard part of 'Pause' becomes a free fantasia, while added hunting-horn motifs underscore the tragic irony of 'Die liebe Farbe'. There are extra bars here, fleeting cross-references there. You get the picture. Schäfer's gritty tones, reminiscent of Peter Schreier, are not the most ingratiating. But his ardent, highly strung miller boy holds the attention, even when the embellishments and flourishes introduce a disconcerting whiff of the rococo.

Schäfer and Koch preface Schubert's cycle of blighted innocence with nine 'miller' songs by Schubert's older Berlin contemporary Ludwig Berger, five of them settings of poems from *Die schöne Müllerin*. Berger's songs, many in 6/8 time,

are pleasantly melodious. Yet hearing, say, his jaunty 'Rose, die Müllerin' (aka 'Die liebe Farbe') against the background of Schubert's sublime threnody underlines not only a chasm in talent but also a radically different Lied aesthetic.

Schubert's songs reached a wider public through Liszt's ingenious piano transcriptions and then in orchestral versions, beginning with Berlioz and Liszt himself. The tradition was taken up by Max Reger and the young Anton Webern, whose orchestrations show him on his best, pre-pointillist behaviour. Reger's well-upholstered versions, of which **Christian Elsner** sings 13, tend to add a too-comfortable gloss to the originals, not least in the Aeschylean *terribilità* of 'Gruppe aus dem Tartarus'. Still, Elsner, his voice poised between the lyric and dramatic, sings with intelligence and feeling, whether in a dulcet 'Du bist die Ruh' (orchestrated by Webern) or an incisive 'Prometheus', which profits from his experience in Wagnerian declamation. Marek Janowski and the Berlin RSO are ever-reliable partners. Not for the only time in this survey, though, the preponderance of slow-to-very-slow songs invites a *Kaffeepause* in mid-CD.

'Leipziger Schule' runs the rubric of a disc of Lieder by the Leipzig-based trio of Robert and Clara Schumann and Mendelssohn, plus, less predictably, Grieg, a one-time student at the Leipzig Conservatory. Schumann encouraged Clara to compose songs and slipped three of them into the Rückert collection *Liebesfrühling*. If her songs are smoother and more predictable than her husband's, they all reveal a gift for shapely, rounded melody. Highlights among the Mendelssohn selection are the haunting barcarolle 'Schilflied' and 'Nachtlied', nobly elegiac without a whiff of sentimentality. **Julia Sophie Wagner** has a clear, true soprano, phrases sensitively and heeds Schumann's characteristic markings *einfach* (simply) and *innig*. More expressive consonants would have made her performances even better. She is touching, too, in the rather Schumannesque Grieg songs, though the climax of 'Ein Traum' implies a fuller tone than she can muster. If you want texts and translations you'll have to scour the internet.

Heinrich Heine, who has inspired more songs than any poet in any language, is the link in a disc of Lieder by Schumann, Liszt and Robert Franz. A German critic once dubbed the prolific Franz 'the first song journalist': a slightly malicious

verdict, perhaps, yet one that's hard to dismiss when listening to his songs en masse. Setting many of the same poems that appear in the Op 24 *Liederkreis* and *Dichterliebe*, Franz's miniatures tend to sound like domesticated Schumann. Biedermeier sweetness rules, leavened by glimpses of stronger emotion, as in a suprisingly passionate 'Ich hab' im Traum geweinet'. **Christian Immler** deploys his dark, mellow baritone with taste and imagination, though he underplays the bitterness in some of the *Liederkreis* songs. He and pianist Georges Starobinski are particularly vivid in the operatically inclined Liszt songs, culminating in the gloriously colourful 'Die Loreley'.

Taking us to the end of the century, the final disc in the dock celebrates the youthful friendship between Richard Strauss and the Tyrolean Ludwig Thuille (1861-1907). 'High-class salon music' was my uncharitable jotting on first hearing, though in fairness Thuille can turn out a deft cameo (say, in the whimsical 'Lied der jungen Hexe') and mine an appealing vein of *fin de siècle* nostalgia. While **Sabina von Walther** tactfully interleaves Thuille with some of Strauss's earliest, least characteristic songs, a smattering of familiar favourites (including the lullaby 'Meinem Kinde') again exposes the gulf between talented journeyman and master. If her singing tends to lack variety, Walther floats a silvery, Straussian line and phrases with grace. Helmut Deutsch provides animation at every opportunity. Dux reduces the disc's potential Anglophone sales by stinting on translations – all the more frustrating when so much of this repertoire is virtually unknown. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Schubert *Die schöne Müllerin*
Schäfer *ten* Koch *pf*
AVI-Music (F) AVI8553333



Schubert *Orchestral Lieder*
Elsner *ten* Berlin RSO / Janowski
Pentatone (F) PTC5186 394



Various Cpsrs 'The Leipzig School'
Wagner *sop* Schneider *pf*
Es-Dur (F) ES2060



Franz Liszt Schumann Heine Lieder
Immler *bar* Starobinski *pf*
BIS (F) BIS2143



R Strauss Thuille Lieder
Walther *sop* Deutsch *pf*
Dux (F) DUX1217

where the epitaph on this tomb praised him as 'the Amphion of his age'.

This hypothetical Marian Vespers collects together an assortment of psalms and antiphons that probably date from his Venetian years but which were circulated in manuscript to German princely chapels. Cornetts and sackbuts are played expertly by the Johann Rosenmüller Ensemble, whereas string and continuo instruments are played judiciously by L'Arco. The Hanover Boys' Choir are joined by guests for the florid upper-voice solos: sopranos Veronika Winter and Maria Skiba, and countertenors Henning Voss and Alex Potter. The tenor and bass solos and also the plainchant antiphons are all sung excellently by senior choristers. The soft-grained choral textures featuring more than 40 younger boys on the treble and alto lines conspire with splendid instrumental playing and intelligent solo singing to pull the listener through a rich banquet of psalms.

A leaner all-adult consort of voices might have achieved more focused dramatic exclamations in passages such as 'Juravit Dominus' in *Dixit Dominus*, but Jörg Breiding's nuanced handling of the juxtapositions between compassionate solo singing and eloquent full choruses is often spot-on. A marvellous setting of *Laudate pueri Dominum* had me on the edge of my seat several times. There is plenty of flair and exuberance in a convivial *Laetatus sum* (during which the Hanoverian tenor and bass soloists are especially impressive). The addition of a high trumpet to the brass ensemble lends a distinctive slant to an eight-part *Lauda Jerusalem*, and the minor-key contrapuntal climax to the *Magnificat* confirms Rosenmüller's stature as supremely gifted composer worthy of a lot more attention. **David Vickers**

Roth

A Time to Dance^a. *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* (Hatfield Service)^b. *Men and Angels*

^aGrace Davidson *sop* ^aMatthew Venner *countertenor*

^aSamuel Boden *ten* ^aGreg Skidmore *bass*

^bTim Harper *org* *Ex Cathedra* / Jeffrey Skidmore
Hyperion (F) CDA68144 (72' • DDD • T)



Composer Alec Roth may be UK-based and of Irish/German descent, but it's

America that provides the musical heritage for his 2012 cantata *A Time to Dance*, recorded here for the first time by *Ex Cathedra*. The music is richly melodic, twitching with rhythmic energy, with wide harmonic vistas conjured up by even more

widely spaced modal harmonies; Copland lies on the horizon of so much of its vibrant directness, shaded by the occasional bluesy nod to Gershwin and even Sondheim.

Roth's long relationship with Jeffrey Skidmore and *Ex Cathedra* has already yielded the exceptional *Shared Ground* (Signum, 2011), and their follow-up collaboration is even stronger. *A Time to Dance* is an hour-long cantata for a quartet of SATB soloists, choir and orchestra (here a Baroque band, inspired by the work's original commission as a companion piece for Bach's *Magnificat*), with all the makings of a modern classic – a work you'd want to perform and, crucially, perform again.

Divided into four sections – 'Spring Morning', 'Summer Noon', 'Autumn Evening' and 'Winter Night' – the work's collage of texts draws with catholic breadth from the likes of Herrick, Blake, Edward Thomas and the Book of Common Prayer. Minutely sensitive to the poetry, Roth binds them into a single coherent musical narrative while retaining the original character of each, whether the fleet-footed energy of Rosetti's 'Dancing on the hill-tops' or the meditative stillness of Thomas's 'Lights out'.

A strong quartet of soloists move through the seasons: Grace Davidson is bright, spring soprano, Samuel Boden sensuous, Brittenish summer; Matthew Venner's countertenor is autumn and bass Greg Skidmore completes the year as winter. All come together with the massed forces of *Ex Cathedra* (on typically fine form) for a stately Globe-style jig, bringing this immensely attractive cycle to its exuberant close.

Choral societies are hungry beasts and there are only so many Rutter *Glorias* they can consume. With *A Time to Dance* Roth has provided a serious alternative – a contemporary work of real character and energy. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Schubert

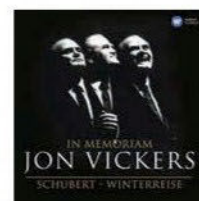
Winterreise, D911

Jon Vickers *ten* Geoffrey Parsons *pf*

Warner Classics (S) 2564 60315-7 (132' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Salle Wagram, Paris, July 9-13, 1983. From EMI Pathé Marconi 173197-3 (11/85).

Disc 2: 'Jon Vickers in Conversation with Jon Tolansky', recorded live at the Barbican Centre Cinema, London, October 25, 1998



Jon Vickers's 1983 *Winterreise* is simply *hors concours*. As with everything he sang, the Canadian tenor's sincerity and depth of feeling are never in doubt. Those

sympathetic to his idiosyncratic, histrionic way with Schubert's cycle will hear something of the appalling intensity of his Grimes, Florestan, Otello and Tristan. From the funereal trudge of 'Gute Nacht', Vickers's wanderer is tormented, death-haunted, unstable in every sense. Many songs – say, 'Wasserflut', 'Rast', 'Einsamkeit' – exude a strange, trance-like calm, sung in a half-voice that verges on a croon. In the frenzied outbursts of rage or despair we glimpse the power of a Titanic voice that was then well past its meridian (almost all the songs are transposed down from their original keys).

Wayward is a laughably inadequate word to describe Vickers's attitude to rhythm. In virtually every song the tempo proposed by the faithful Geoffrey Parsons is merely a basis for negotiation. Thwarting the pianist's every attempt to create that crucial Schubertian *gebende Bewegung* or forward motion, Vickers distends and chops up phrases at will. The results will sound illuminating or indulgent, even grotesque, according to taste. Has any singer, I wonder, ever drawn out the climactic 'Wein' in 'Letzte Hoffnung' to such masochistic lengths? Diehard Vickers aficionados who failed to acquire this recording on its initial release will need no prompting, of course – and the 'bonus' CD offers interesting reflections on the tenor's operatic career.

As you'll have guessed, after repeated hearings my own reactions to this *Winterreise* have veered between mesmerised fascination and faint revulsion. But I wouldn't have missed it.

Richard Wigmore

Schütz

Symphoniae sacrae I

Weser-Renaissance Bremen / Manfred Cordes
CPO © 2 CPO777 929-2 (93') • DDD • T/t

Schütz

Symphoniae sacrae III

Dresden Chamber Choir; Dresden Baroque Orchestra / Hans-Christoph Rademann
Carus © 2 CARUS83 258 (119') • DDD • T/t



These two ensembles are (along with Cantus Cölln) among the finest and most prolific exponents of Schütz on CD. With these new recordings they each begin tackling the monumental series of *Symphoniae sacrae*, published at intervals

between 1629 and 1650. The first volume sets Latin works exclusively and (as the booklet-note remarks) is something of an outlier within the composer's output.

Most striking perhaps is the handful of settings from the Song of Songs, in which Schütz taps a vein that more than recalls his Italian colleagues in a similar idiom. They are wonderfully expressive, making one lament anew the total loss of the composer's music for the stage. Manfred Cordes, as usual in Schütz (only his *Cantiones sacrae* volume disappointed), has assembled a very fine cast of soloists who functions equally well as an ensemble.

But the number of singing parts is comparatively small compared to the set's total instrumental requirements: players outnumber singers by three to one, with cornetts, sackbuts and dulcians appearing in groups of two, three and four. The three dulcians of *In lectulo per noctes* and the four sackbuts of *Fili mi, Absalon* are especially memorable. That said, one hesitates to single out particular pieces when there is so much to appreciate.

When the first set was published, the Thirty Years War was in full swing, bringing with it a reduction of the forces available to the composer; but by the time *Symphoniae sacrae III* was issued, it was possible once again for Schütz to envisage pieces on the scale of the *Psalmes Davids* of his youth. (The magnificent *Nun danket alle Gott* that closes the set must have referred to the war's end.) Here, polychoral music predominates, and the individual pieces are commonly on a grander scale (the odd miniature, such as the famous *Saul, Saul, was verfolgst du mich*, notwithstanding). As in their *Psalmes Davids* set, the Dresdner Kammerchor distinguish between the choirs by opposing soloists in one choir and ensemble in the other, complemented by instruments. This sets it apart from Cantus Cölln, their rivals in both sets, who opt for solo voices all round. The dispute on this point, though not quite as heated as with Bach, is a significant one within Schütz scholarship; but to the neutral observer the distinction is welcome in that there is so little to choose between the two ensembles in terms of quality or approach. I said much the same in my review of the *Psalmes Davids* a couple of years ago (1/14), though in this case it's perhaps Rademann's team who edge it, on account of their fuller sound (which, I should stress, is not only a matter of the number of voices).

Both of these new recordings have copious and informative introductory texts. It really is a good time in which to be a Schütz fan. **Fabrice Fitch**

Symphoniae Sacrae III – selected comparison:

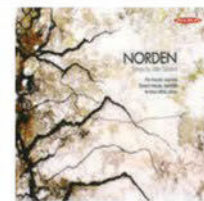
Cantus Cölln, Junghübel (1/06) (HARM) HMC90 1850/51

Sibelius

'Norden – Songs'

Seven Songs, Op 13 – No 1, Under strandens granar; No 3, Hjärtats morgon; No 4, Våren flyktar hastigt; No 5, Drömmen; No 6, Till Frigga; No 7, Jägargossen. Seven Songs, Op 17 – No 2, Sov in!; No 4, Vilse; No 6, Till kvällen. Six Songs, Op 36 – No 1, Svarta rosor; No 3, Bollspelet vid Trianon; No 4, Säf, säf, susa; No 5, Marssnön; No 6, Demanten på marssnön. Five Songs, Op 37 – No 1, Den första kyssen; No 2, Lasse liten; No 4, Var det en dröm?; No 5, Flickan kom från sin älsklings möte. Six Songs, Op 72 – No 3, Kyssens hopp; No 4, Kaiutar. Six Songs, Op 90 – No 1, Norden; No 2, Hennes budskap; No 5, Sommarnatten; No 6, Vem styrde hit din väg?. I natten, Op 38 No 3. Långsamt som qvällskyn, Op 61 No 1. Och finns det en tanke, Op 86 No 4. Små flickorna (Young Girls). Tanken (The Thought). En visa (A Song)

Pia Freund *sop* Tommi Hakala *bar* Kristian Attila *pf*
Alba © ABCD384 (70') • DDD • T/t



This selection of about a third of Sibelius's solo songs with piano confirms again the

composer's imaginatively wide selection of (Swedish) lyrics to set, ranging from the sometimes sad Romantic country-based imagery of poets such as Johan Ludvig Runeberg ('Tanken' or 'Norden'), 'The Thought' or 'The North') and Gustaf Fröding's 'Säf, säf, susa' ('Sigh, sigh, sedges') to the very urban 20th-century wit of Hjalmar Procopé's 'Små flickorna'. Here the 'Young Girls' of the title 'walk with pert expressions / And flustered morning fringes / To the tapping of typewriters / And telephone greetings' and a teasing, walking piano accompaniment.

The push and pull of this 'watching all the girls go by' showtime atmosphere is perfectly judged here by Pia Freund and Kristian Attila – although the joke oddly seems to escape a more heavily paced rival reading from Elisabeth Söderström on Decca's collection of all the songs. The immediately following, and rather spooky, 'I natten' ('In the Night') confirms the good touch and dramatic sense of Attila, who makes as much of these often-criticised piano parts (surely their space is meant as a kit for interpreters to work with) as any modern pianist aside from Bengt Forsberg for Anne Sofie von Otter.

Generally speaking, Freund and Tommi Hakala here find an attractively intimate, chamber route into these songs, short-changing on neither enjoyment nor pain but without the more heart-on-sleeve approach of the



Jeffrey Skidmore and Ex Cathedra recording music by Alec Roth for their new disc on Hyperion (review page 77)

justifiably famous Kim Borg 1950s DG recital or von Otter's BIS collection. It's hard to signal outright winners in a field that's happily increasing in both number and interpretative range, but this new collection, with well-balanced natural recording and including many better-known items, stands up well alongside the two cited above and that by Katarina Karnéus. **Mike Ashman**

Songs – selected comparisons:

Borg, Werba (1/59th) (DG) 477 6612GM

Karnéus, Drake (7/02nd) (HYPE) CDH55471

Von Otter, Forsberg (4/96) (BIS) BIS-CD757

Söderström et al (DECC) 478 8609DB4

Tchaikovsky

'None But the Lonely Heart'

Six Songs, Op 6 – No 2, Not a word, O my friend; No 5, Why?; No 6, None but the lonely heart. Reconciliation, Op 25 No 1. The fearful minute, Op 28 No 6. Six Songs, Op 38 – No 2, It was in the early spring; No 3, At the ball. Seven Songs, Op 47 – No 3, Dusk fell on the earth; No 5, I bless you, forests; No 6, Does the day reign?; No 7, Was I not a little blade of grass?; Six Songs, Op 57 – No 2, On the golden cornfields; No 6, Only thou alone. Twelve Songs, Op 60 – No 6, Frenzied nights; No 7, Gypsy's Song; No 12, The mild stars shone for us. Six Songs, Op 73 – No 1, We sat together; No 2, Night; No 4, The sun has set

Nadia Krasteva *mez* **Dora Deliyiska** *pf*
Gramola © 99043 (62' • DDD • T/t)



Christian Heindl muses, in his booklet-note, that Tchaikovsky's songs might have achieved greater international fame if the composer had set German or French texts in their original languages. 'None but the lonely heart' – still his 'hit song' and used as the title to this disc – was based on a Goethe poem that had previously been set by Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann. Tchaikovsky preferred to use Russian translations or texts, and his romances, despite some very fine recordings, remain a lesser-known part of his repertoire.

Bulgarian mezzo Nadia Krasteva offers a sprinkling of them, presented in published order. Of the 13 song collections composed throughout Tchaikovsky's career, eight are represented here. It's a melancholic selection of love, loss and loneliness. Krasteva has a ripe, smoky mezzo, sounding not unlike Olga Borodina, and she doesn't pull her vocal punches. She

rises to the dramatic challenges of 'Dusk fell on the earth' gloriously and there is burnished purple in her lower register in 'The fearful minute'.

There is a lovely cantilena lilt to 'I bless you, forests' (a beautiful song) before it builds to an impassioned climax. Hints of unsteadiness at the top are forgivable when the songs are full of such emotion. Misfires are few. Dora Deliyiska plays a lovely piano introduction to 'Reconciliation' but Krasteva then rushes her fences, making it more desperate than usual, knocking about a minute off most interpretations.

One of the lines in 'Night' goes, 'My soul is worn out by sorrow'. This final Op 73 set was composed at the same time as Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*, but Krasteva doesn't always scale her dynamic down enough, which makes her recital a bit relentless in its turbo-charged delivery.

With booklet texts in Cyrillic, German and English, this is a worthwhile Tchaikovsky programme showcasing a fine singer.

Mark Pullinger

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REISSUES

Rob Cowan on a neglected master and **Peter Quantrill** on Erik Satie, whose 150th anniversary falls this May

A new perspective

Past assessments of the pianist **Eugene Istomin** (1925–2003) have too often delivered the metaphorical verdict ‘always the bridesmaid, never the bride’. Istomin’s profile is invariably associated with the distinguished triumvirate, the Stern-Rose-Istomin Trio, and not much beyond that, at least not here in the UK. Sony Classical’s collection of ‘The Concerto and Solo Recordings’ serves to focus on a quite different side to Istomin’s art, a far more assertive player and, in Rachmaninov’s Second Concerto with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, a virtuoso very much in the Byron Janis league. The year is 1956, the mono sound clear and immediate if just a little constricted, the concerto’s opening massive in the extreme, the fugato in the finale super-fast. It seems obvious to me that, like Earl Wild a few years later, Istomin took his principal lead from the composer’s own recordings of the piece, and the result is compelling in the extreme.

Likewise a set of Chopin Nocturnes from the previous year: largely unaffected playing informed by the merest suggestion of Rubinstein’s grandeur, tone and musical poise, though with a youthful, sometimes restless edge that places it on its own patch. I loved the impetuosity and poetry of Istomin’s Schumann Concerto under Bruno Walter, possibly the best Schumann we have from the conductor and very well recorded (in stereo). On the same disc, a further collaboration with Ormandy, Chopin’s Second Concerto, with tasteful characterisation throughout and a superb accompaniment.

Beethoven’s Triple with ‘the Trio’ is famous, as handsome a performance as exists anywhere on disc (I personally prefer it to the rather less genial Oistrakh-Richter-Rostropovich-Karajan version on EMI/Warner), now coupled with Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto, a reading that glistens in every rippling detail and is, at times, reminiscent of Istomin’s teacher

Rudolf Serkin, specifically Serkin’s mono recording (also with Ormandy and the Philadelphia). Among a handful of first releases are two Beethoven sonatas: the little F sharp minor, Op 78, always a good test for fastidious musical judgement (Istomin passes with flying colours), and a *Waldstein* Sonata from 1959, amazingly dextrous playing that reminded me of Solomon. A group of Schubert Impromptus displays similar qualities and there’s a big, very spontaneous-sounding account of Schubert’s D major Sonata, D850, a work in which Schnabel excelled: as Jed Distler’s excellent notes inform us, Istomin was very familiar with Schnabel’s style of playing. Stravinsky’s Sonata is another valuable first release, a performance notable for warmth rather than the more predictable angularity.

As to the rest, Tchaikovsky’s First Concerto, again with Ormandy, is at its most poignant at the start of the second movement, where cleanly unanimous *pizzicatos* and a gorgeous flute solo pave the way for Istomin’s melting first entry. Ormandy was well known as an exponent of Brahms’s Second Concerto – his recordings with Serkin attest to that – and, if anything, his partnership with Istomin presents an even more vital account of the orchestral score, perhaps the best from across the pond alongside Reiner in Chicago (for Gilels). Brahms’s *Handel* Variations are given with considerable virtuosity though I found the last of the three Intermezzos, Op 117, a mite too fast, even given the *Andante con moto* direction in the score.



But for me the most delightful surprise was the first disc, a programme of Bach and Mozart that opens with a valuable supplement to the Busch Chamber Players’ Bach legacy, an elegant though dramatic account of the great D minor Keyboard Concerto, BWV1042, where the 19-year-old Istomin combines the rhythmic resilience of Serkin with the poetic delicacy of Edwin Fischer. The cadenzas are energetically played, as is the first-movement cadenza for the Fifth *Brandenburg Concerto*, where Istomin’s performing partners are violinist Joseph Szigeti, flautist John Wummer and the Prades Festival Orchestra under Pablo Casals. At this relatively late point in his career Szigeti couldn’t always be relied upon to deliver unblemished goods, but here he does. We also have the Toccata and Fugue in E minor, BWV914, and, harking back to Serkin again, a vital performance of Mozart’s Piano Concerto No 14 in E flat, K449, with Casals and the Perpignan Festival Orchestra, that in key respects resembles the one that Serkin made pre-war with Busch and his orchestra. Altogether a very valuable collection (which sells for about £30) and an effective prompt not so much to re-evaluate Eugene Istomin as to grant him a status he was previously denied, at least within these shores. **Rob Cowan**

THE RECORDING

Eugene Istomin The Concerto

and Solo Recordings

Sony Classical © 12 88875 02617-2

The eccentric M Satie

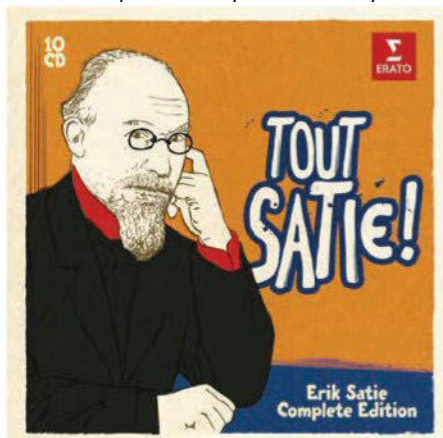
It only takes a minute to get hooked on Satie. Maybe less. He is there, instantly, in the doleful swing of the First *Gymnopédie*, which pianists across the globe will pull from their childhood music books to repurpose as an encore in this, the 150th anniversary year of his birth. There, no less, in the inane tumbings of the 10-minute *Cinéma* he provided to accompany a silent film screened between the two acts of *Relâche* ('No performance tonight'), his last major work. Still there in the heavy, inverted Gregorian melody of the Prelude for the *Fête donnée par des chevaliers normands en l'honneur d'une jeune demoiselle* – which is not the longest title in this unmissable collection.

Will the real Satie step forward? Absurd question. In the artistic manifesto he published in 1917, Satie claimed the idea was all in the melody, and 'The Idea can do without Art'. Catnip for John Cage, but it's in the harmony, often as superficially similar as the seven corduroy suits he wore for the last two decades of his life, that Satie is instantly and fully himself, the 'Precursor' as he called himself before turning the phrase on Debussy at the end of their fractious friendship.

Listening through to one of the piano-music discs which make up the meat of the collection is like a dinner of oysters, perhaps from Honfleur, scene of Satie's unhappy childhood. By the time of *Ogives* (from 1886, but the wallet track-list confusingly gives the publication date, three years later), his first major collection, he had entered – and been thrown out of – the Paris Conservatoire, and he was already, recognisably, Satie, and his compositional language hardly developed more than the pieces themselves. In that sense there is a hare-brained logic to the scheme of pieces scattered with scant regard for theme or chronology. On disc 3, the *Gymnopédies* of 1888 are succeeded by the 'maternal instructions' of *L'enfance de Ko-Quo* (1913), one of several new recordings made for the set by Alexandre Tharaud and by Jean-Pierre Armengaud, who contributes solo piano versions of the late ballets, *Mercure* (a joyous collaboration with Picasso) and *Relâche*.



Erik Satie: his 150th anniversary will be widely celebrated this year



In those early piano collections – *Ogives*, *Pièces froides*, *Gnossiennes* and more – each morsel slips down easily, leaving just a memory of itself but a hunger for more. They are profoundly understated, as Howard Skempton has observed, but it would be a mistake not to take them and their composer seriously: 'He is his music, and this is what one has to say when people describe his music as simple...this rather softly spoken, tactful, sweetly reasonable man was a perfect anti-hero, a perfect model.' And, as the eccentrically translated booklet-essay remarks, 'it was around his small goatee beard that le Groupe des Six was gathered together'.

The advertised claim of 'Tout Satie!' was always going to be a stretch. 'Complete Published Edition' is nearer the mark. Only the preludes to the three acts of *Le fils des étoiles* are presented here; Alexei Lubimov has recorded the entire, hour-long ballet score. It's more of the same,

but that's the point. The compilers have turned to Jean-Yves Thibaudet's precise and characterful Decca recordings to fill the gaps but left most of the piano music to Aldo Ciccolini's old EMI set, which is now betraying its age. When not distantly recorded, the piano sound is often harsh, sometimes not ideally in tune, and Ciccolini is more temperamentally inclined towards the anarchic *Sports et divertissements* side of Satie than the period, around 1892, of *Vexations* and the *Sonneries de la Rose+Croix*, where Reinbert de Leeuw on Philips (12/89) is essential listening, mellow and poised, creating a private chapel of sound to match

the one-man church Satie founded for himself. Coincident with his single, brief, failed romantic attachment, to the painter Suzanne Valadon, they were followed by the *Messe des Pauvres*, an organ Mass hustled through by Gaston Litaize but on the right kind of instrument (location and maker frustratingly unspecified) to give the impression of Messiaen's *Apparition de l'Eglise Eternelle* doing jazz hands.

The songs are more stylishly done, by Mady Mesplé, Gabriel Bacquier and Nicolai Gedda (all accompanied by Ciccolini), and Anne Queffélec catches the lazy, sometimes crazy gait of the café-cabaret pieces which were among the few pieces to earn Satie real money, to his chagrin. The more moving for her restraint, Mesplé returns in *Socrate*, long the cause of critical contention no less bewildered than Plato's interlocutors. Masterpiece or the work of a farceur, wondered Philip Hope-Wallace in these pages. In the dignity of the philosopher's dying monologue, both *Dialogues des Carmélites* and *Akhnaten* are plain to hear, on a canvas as simple and white as the *First Communion of Anaemic Young Girls in the Snow* by Satie's friend Allais. Like all his best music, it involves 'a very personal exchange,' as Skempton says, 'for the listener at home, perhaps on headphones'.

Peter Quantrill

THE RECORDING

'**Tout Satie!**' Erik Satie Complete Edition
Erato © 10 2564 60479-6

Opera



Kate Molleson listens to a varied selection of new operatic works:

'No subject is too racy or too dry, no venue too tiny or industrial, no fusion of musical styles too weird' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



David Fanning on the premiere recording of Weinberg's *The Idiot*:

'The unflashy, flexible yet consistent harmonic language provides a superb mirror of Mysbkin's tortured soul' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 89**

Ariosti

'London - Arias for Alto'

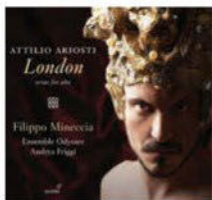
Aquilio Consolo - Rinasce amor. **Caio Marzio**

Coriolano - Overture; Presto; Io spero che in quei guardi; Perdonate, o cari amori; Spirate, o iniqui marmi...Voi d'un figlio tanto misero. **Dario** - Voi del ciel pietosi numi. **I gloriosi presagi di Scipione Africano** - Bella mia, lascia ch'io vada. **La profezia d'Eliseo nell'assedio di Samaria** - Sinfonia. **Tito Manlio** - Aure care; Col nemico di mia pace; Venga pur quel sì terribile. **Vespasiano** - Premerà soglio di morte; Sorga pur l'oppressa Roma. La madre de' Maccabei - Benché l'ultimo al tormento; Quando il mondo fabbricò

Filippo Mineccia *countertenor*

Ensemble Odyssee / **Andrea Friggi**

Glossa © GCD923506 (75' • DDD • T/T)



This recital devoted to Attilio Ariosti (1666-1729) offers an indispensable chance

to broaden our appreciation of Italian opera in early Georgian London beyond the ubiquitous Handel. Probably trained in music at the prestigious San Petronio in his native Bologna, Ariosti took holy orders at the age of 20 but pursued a high-profile musical career in Berlin, Vienna and London, where his opera *Tito Manlio* concluded the 1717 season; the title-hero's 'Venga pur quel sì terribile' is a concise lament full of harmonic richness that proves Ariosti was no mere also-ran.

Notwithstanding the album's misleading title, several works represented here were created for Vienna: 'Bella mia, lascia ch'io vada' from *Scipione Africano* (1704) features a gentle obbligato theorbo played sensitively by Giulio Quirici, and there are exquisite *concertante* strings including a pair of high cellos in 'Quando il mondo fabbricò' from the oratorio *La madre de' Maccabei* (also 1704). The high point of the extracts from Ariosti's London operas is the soliloquy for the unjustly imprisoned Roman title-hero in *Coriolano* (1723), which has an extraordinary chromatic accompanied recitative leading into a

striking aria; Ensemble Odyssee exploit the dramatic potential of Ariosti's enharmonic invention and make it clear why Rameau praised it in his treatise on harmony. Filippo Mineccia also sings another two interesting arias from *Coriolano* - the ardent 'Perdonate, o cari amori' and 'Io spero che in quei guardi', which oscillates between charming passages adorned by affectionate pastoral recorders and animated tempestuous outbursts.

Mineccia's falsetto occasionally hoots when pressed under increased velocity, and his low notes are not always smoothly incorporated into florid phrases, but he more than makes up for minor blemishes by never producing anything less than total theatrical conviction - and his soft singing in Servilia's lovely pastoral 'Aure care' (from *Tito Manlio*) suggests that he is rapidly maturing into an expressive and versatile artist. **David Vickers**

Boismortier

Don Quichotte chez la Duchesse

François-Nicolas Geslot *ten*..... Don Quichotte

Marc Labonnette *bar*..... Sancho Panza

Chantal Santon Jeffery *sop*.....

..... Altisidore/Queen of Japan

Marie-Pierre Wattiez *sop*..... Peasant Girl

Gilles Benizio *sgr*..... Duke/Japanese Man

Virgile Ancely *bass*.... Montesinos/Merlin/Translator

Agathe Boudet *sop*..... Lover/Attendant

Charles Barbier *ten*..... Lover

Le Concert Spirituel / **Hervé Niquet**

Stage directors **Corinne & Gilles Benizio**

(*alias Shirley & Dino*)

Video director **Louise Narboni**

Alpha © DVD ALPHA711 (117' • NTSC • 16:9 •

PCM stereo • O • S)

Recorded live at Versailles Palace, February 2015



Don Quichotte chez la Duchesse, to a libretto by the prolific Charles-Simon Favart, was staged at the Paris Opera in February 1743. Though described as a *ballet-comique*, it's an opera in all but name. But what kind of an opera?

Hervé Niquet recorded it in 1996:

60 minutes of music, delightfully sung and played. This DVD lasts twice as long, the co-directors Gilles and Corinne Benizio (*alias Shirley & Dino*) asserting that 'the comedy scenes that tie the show together are lost' and have to be reinvented. However, back in 1743 the opera was coupled with Mouret's *Les amours de Ragonde*, which was sung throughout; so there's at least a question mark over the claim that *Don Quichotte* is dramatically incomplete.

Favart based his fantasy on an episode in the second volume of Cervantes's novel. In the course of their travels, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are recognised by the Duke and Duchess, who embark on a series of practical jokes for the amusement of their court. The Duchess assumes the character of Altisidore, who seeks to divert Quixote from his obsession with Dulcinea. She is unsuccessful, even when pretending to be the Queen of Japan. There are spells, and fights with a monster, a dwarf and a giant. In the end, 'Merlin' terminates the deception, and Quixote is praised for his steadfastness. In the final divertissement, Quixote is crowned King of Japan.

Whether you regard this as silliness or rather unkind fun will depend on your taste, or perhaps your mood. The score consists of a succession of recitatives, airs, choruses and dances, none of them long: the music is mainly light, always attractive, with a moment of genuine feeling when Quixote thinks he is about to rescue Dulcinea. As Altisidore, a part originally sung by Marie Fel, Chantal Santon Jeffery provides the best singing in the show; Marc Labonnette makes an engaging, Papageno-like Sancho. François-Nicolas Geslot acts well enough as the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance (or the 'Knight of the sad face', as the booklet oddly puts it), but his singing sounds effortful and strained.

As for the rest...the versatile Niquet enters the auditorium as Quixote and later appears dressed as a toreador. He addresses the audience, and sings to them too. He plays the castanets onstage while



Silliness or unkind fun? Boismortier's *Don Quichotte chez la Duchesse* in the Versailles production by 'Shirley & Dino'

performing a tango ('Hernando's Hideaway') with Corinne Benizio, and engages in unfunny badinage with Gilles Benizio's Duke. I found it tiresome. A lukewarm welcome, then; but the 1996 CD is well worth getting.

Richard Lawrence

Selected comparison:

Niquet (6/97) (NAXO) 8 553647

Gluck

Iphigénie en Tauride

Caitlin Hulcup *mez* Iphigénie
Christopher Saunders *ten* Pylade
Grant Doyle *bar* Oreste
Margaret Plummer *mez* Diane/Priestess
Christopher Richardson *bass-bar* Thoas
Nicholas Dinopoulos *bass-bar* Scythian Guard
Cantillation; Orchestra of the Antipodes /
Antony Walker

Pinchgut Opera © 2 PG006 (111' • DDD)

Recorded live at City Recital Hall, Angel Place,
 Sydney, December 2014



Triumphantly premiered in Paris in 1779, *Iphigénie en Tauride* is Gluck's

supreme masterpiece and the culmination of his efforts to purge opera of superfluous decoration and display. The action moves forwards swiftly and remorselessly. Iphigenia herself and her tormented brother Orestes inspired some of Gluck's most powerful music, some of it fruitfully recycled from earlier operas. There are splendidly barbaric numbers for the Scythian King Thoas and his followers, while the choruses for Iphigenia's priestesses are the quintessence of Gluck's famed 'classical simplicity'.

For all its musical and dramatic glories, Iphigenia's noble austerity and absence of obvious 'hit' numbers have always militated against its wider popularity. In a still-sparse recorded field, the benchmarks have long been the performances conducted by Martin Pearlman, with Christine Goerke in the crucial title-role, and Marc Minkowski, with Mireille Delunsch. If not quite in their class, this new recording, taken from performances by the Sydney-based Pinchgut Opera, is certainly welcome. Antony Walker has a feeling for the broad Gluckian sweep and secures lively if not always immaculate playing from his period band. That said, both Pearlman and, especially, Minkowski

have a lighter, more graceful rhythmic touch in the lyrical numbers and are more alive to the colours in Gluck's deceptively simple score – say, in the churning viola obbligato that contradicts the sense of Orestes's 'Le calme rentre dans mon coeur' (here too muted), or the plangent sustained bassoons in the Priestesses' 'Quand verrons nous tarir nos pleurs'.

Except for the underpowered, monochrome Pylade, all the singers impress, musically and dramatically, not least the glowing soprano of Margaret Plummer as First Priestess and *dea ex machina* Diana. The chorus, too, sing splendidly, with the women sounding properly ethereal in Gluck's chaste, otherworldly music for the Priestesses. In the difficult role of Thoas, Christopher Richardson combines a baleful bass colouring with easy negotiation of the high tessitura. He thunders imperiously but also vividly embodies the fearful obsession of his Act 1 solo 'De noirs pressentiments'. Despite the odd moment of strain, Grant Doyle makes an impassioned and moving Orestes, fining down his virile baritone to a numb *pianissimo* for the illusory peace of 'Le calme rentre dans mon coeur'.

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

CONTEMPORARY OPERAS

Kate Molleson takes the current temperature of opera comparing five recent examples on disc of the art form



Rufus Wainwright (left) and husband Jörn Weisbrodt dressed as Verdi and Puccini at *Prima Donna*'s 2009 premiere

Opera is in vogue – everyone is at it. Rock operas, folk operas, hip-hoperas, operas on the history of university chemistry departments and operas on the history of radical improvised music collectives. No subject is too racy or too dry, no venue too tiny or industrial, no fusion of musical styles too weird. ‘Opera is here to ennoble us,’ said Baron van Swieten in the Peter Shaffer film *Amadeus*, but not now, it isn’t. Now it’s here to do all sorts of things, and the explosion of the form – democratising ownership and access, injecting fresh aesthetic blood from outside the classical sphere – is, by and large, a tremendously healthy thing.

But this clutch of underwhelming recent recordings also shows how often new opera loses its way and misses the point (the point being, as I understand it, that music, words and theatre should together make an emotional impact more profound than any one element can make alone). Of these five pieces, all premiered in the past decade, only Robin de Raaff’s *Waiting for Miss Monroe* comes close to offering much psychological depth or intrigue, or much musical invention. Among the others there is a great deal of drifting in the shallows of post-modern pastiche and grasping at parody and grand gesture to avoid the tougher task of conveying genuine passion.

Time was that the shift away from tonality meant opera narratives could be audaciously non-linear and non-literal: I’m thinking Harrison Birtwistle’s *The Mask of Orpheus* or Wolfgang Rihm’s *Séraphin*. But the five dramas under review here are strikingly obvious in their storytelling, as though the pervasive sense of duty to make opera accessible depends on hitting an audience in the face with unmissable musical and dramatic signifiers. And is it noteworthy that all five pieces revolve around a brave and lonely woman protagonist? Clearly the allure of the female voice, its power and its vulnerability, still plays the muse for many a male composer.

Vocal standards are impressive, technically speaking, but often haven’t caught up with today’s norm of up-close reality stagings. Opera doesn’t have to be loud, not when there’s a small ensemble and the audience is right there, but singers are still taught to use a default mode of full-throttle for the big stage. Financial and stylistic incentives for lithe, small-scale music theatre should mean an opportunity to draw listeners into an intimate and sensitive sound world; often that’s an opportunity missed.

Intimate and sensitive Rufus Wainwright’s *Prima Donna* is not. When it was premiered at the 2009 Manchester International Festival, the thick, derivative

music – a checklist of operatic clichés from Verdi onwards – drew much sucking of teeth. The story tells a day in the life of a once-great singer who dreams of returning to the stage. Janis Kelly is impressively dignified as the diva, Richard Morrison her domineering butler, Antonio Figueroa a journalist heart-throb and Kathryn Guthrie the maid. Jayce Ogren conducts the BBC Symphony Orchestra, all surging strings and cooing winds. Wainwright clearly loves opera and integrates operatic elements into his lavishly orchestrated and structurally complex pop songs (Elton John has called him ‘the greatest songwriter on the planet’). The extravagance fits his persona and he duly arrived at the opening night of *Prima Donna* wearing a top hat and wielding a silver-topped cane. Musically, too, you get the sense he’s wearing fancy dress.

Breathe Freely is a chamber opera for three singers and three instruments with music and libretto by Scottish composer Julian Wagstaff. Its subject is the chemistry department of the University of Edinburgh during the Second World War – the department commissioned the piece – with a backdrop of Scotland’s role supporting the Polish resistance and the ethics of biochemical wartime research. In some ways I admire the clarity of the piece: Wagstaff keeps things simple, keeps the story straight and writes tonal, tuneful, anodyne set pieces with jaunty backing from the piano trio. Laura Margaret Smith is a spirited young mezzo with a full, fearless voice and the ability to inject big character into prosaic lines. She’s a name to watch.

The Radio Hour by composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer is a ‘choral opera’ – the chorus sings all the characters, either in unison or in busy polyphony. The central figure is an unhappy middle-aged woman called Nora, played by a silent actress, and the voices represent her inner dialogues and the furniture in her home (an idea pinched from Ravel). Lines unfurl in weighty stream-of-consciousness: ‘put down your stupid, stupid, stupid phone’, ‘that’s a really weird video’, ‘I’m scared’. Heggie studiously mimics swing, rap and radio jingles; the music is pacy and glossy. To his credit he doesn’t fall into the usual contemporary-opera trap of aimless arioso vocal writing, and his voices and instruments tug and tussle more effectively than those of, say, *Breathe Freely*. Is *The Radio Hour* an opera? If anything the form is more Greek tragedy or passion, in the vein of Bach’s fickle, chattering crowds. John Alexander conducts members of the

Pacific Symphony and the John Alexander Singers from Southern California. The performance is upbeat, chipper and far more Broadway than *bel canto*.

Brooding, febrile atmosphere hits you like a sledgehammer in **The Little Match Girl** by billionaire composer/philanthropist Gordon Getty. The libretto sets Hans Christian Andersen's text near-word-for-word, which makes for a lot of words. It's another collective effort in which the story is told by the chorus; whether strictly opera or not, the music is awfully grandiose for a tale of such devastating loneliness. Asher Fisch conducts the Bavarian Radio Symphony Choir and the Munich Radio Orchestra in a performance that accordingly doesn't hold back.

De Raaff's **Waiting for Miss Monroe** is worth hearing. Based on Marilyn Monroe's final months and the candid diary tapes she recorded (tantalisingly never released), Janine Brogt's libretto is brash, gritty and stark against Raaff's fizzy, frenetic, acrid score. There are major vocal challenges for soprano Laura Aitkin and she rises to them impressively, seductively, flexibly. The rest of the cast is also good: Dale Duesing as the studio boss Fox, Tom Randle as Joe DiMaggio, Maria Kowan as the photographer Eve, John Tessier and Daniel Belcher as the Kennedy brothers. But here's the problem that keeps cropping up: De Raaff's most interesting music happens in the pit. That's where he is most inventive and where he most lets rip. (Steven Sloane conducts an agile and gutsy-sounding Netherlands Chamber Orchestra). How to write compelling and convincing dialogue for voices? With all the freedoms of contemporary opera, the biggest hurdles often remain the most fundamental. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Wainwright Prima Donna
BBC SO / Ogren
DG **M** ② 479 5340GH2



Wagstaff Breathe Freely
Breathe Freely Ens
Linn **E** CKD535



Heggie The Radio Hour
Pacific SO / Alexander
Delos **E** DE3484



Getty The Little Match Girl
Munich Rad Orch / Fisch
Pentatone **E** PTC5186 480



De Raaff Waiting for Miss Monroe
Netherlands CO / Sloane
Challenge Classics **E** CC72685

While Caitlin Hulcup cannot match Minkowski's Mireille Delunsch in expressive French declamation, her lyric high mezzo, enfolding deeper, grander colourings, and sense of vulnerability are well-nigh ideal for the title-role. She is a fine vocal actress, responding acutely to each psychological phase in the unfolding drama. Iphigenia's sublime soliloquy 'O malheureuse Iphigénie' is beautifully phrased and shaded, sadness etched in the very texture of her voice (though the obbligato oboe here is distinctly prosaic); and she is magnificent in the heroic anguish of her Act 4 aria 'Je t'implore et je tremble'.

The recording minimises stage and audience noise, though singers can suffer in the balance in the more heavily scored numbers. While Minkowski remains my first choice, for its stronger overall cast and thrilling sense of drama, this new *Iphigénie* is an appreciable achievement, above all for Hulcup's unfailingly eloquent and intense singing of the title-role.

Richard Wigmore

Selected comparisons:

Pearlman (12/00) (TELA) CD80546

Minkowski (7/01) (ARCH) 471 133-2AH2

Leclair

Scylla et Glaucus

Emőke Barath *sop*..... Scylla

Anders J Dahlin *ten*..... Glaucus

Caroline Mutel *sop*..... Circé

Virginie Pochon *sop*.....

.....Dorine/Venus/Shepherdess/Sicilian Girl

Marie Lenormand *mez*..... L'Amour/Témire

Frédéric Caton *bar*..... Chief/Licas/Hécate

Marie-Frédérique Girod *sop*..... Chorus Girl

Marina Venant *sop*..... Dryad/Coryphée I

Sarah Jouffroy *mez*..... Coryphée II

Vincent Laloy *ten*..... Propélide I

Pierre-Antoine Chaumien *ten*.....

.....Propélide II/Shepherd

Jean-Baptiste Dumora *bar*..... Sylvan

Les Nouveaux Caractères / Sébastien d'Hérin *hpd*

Alpha **M** ③ ALPHA960 (160' • DDD • T/T)



In Homer, it is Circe who warns Odysseus of the perils of steering his ship between two rocks: one the home of Scylla, a six-headed monster given to snatching sailors from passing vessels; the other occupied by Charybdis, who causes whirlpools that drag entire crews to their death. But this opera is drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and it's Circe herself who brings about the dreadful fate of Scylla, an innocent nymph.

Leclair's only opera was performed at the Paris Opéra in October 1746. The singers included Marie Fel and Pierre de Jélyotte, the stars of many of Rameau's operas; the dancers included the equally Ramellian La Camargo. It ran for 18 performances, after which it disappeared. The Prologue surprisingly glorifies Louis XV and the Dauphin; we could be back in the days of Lully and the Sun King. The story is a simple one. Scylla is indifferent to love: she rejects the approach of a shepherd and a sylvan, despite the advocacy of the chorus, and is angered when Glaucus tries the same tack. Glaucus turns to Circe for help. The sorceress, smitten, immediately seeks to enchant him and vows vengeance when, after nearly succumbing, Glaucus dashes off. Scylla decides that she loves him after all, but she is poisoned by the unforgiving Circe. The last scene shows the Straits of Messina, with Charybdis and the transformed Scylla; Circe flies off, uttering curses.

The libretto is serviceable, but the plotting shows signs of inexperience. Circe's ministers bewitch Glaucus at leisure, but it only takes two words from his friend Lichas to recall him to his senses; and his response to Scylla's metamorphosis verges on the perfunctory. The music, though, is excellent and deserves to be better known. The vivid orchestral writing includes rushing scales as Circe does her worst, a musette (the dance) with a musette (the bagpipe), and ear-tickling hemiolas, where the rhythmic pulse cuts across the bar-lines. The harmonic language is effective, too: a surprising interrupted cadence, for instance, makes clear Glaucus's true feelings.

Les Nouveaux Caractères under Sébastien d'Hérin sing and play splendidly. Anders J Dahlin, an old hand in this repertoire, is in excellent voice. Emőke Barath catches the tender and the fiery sides to Scylla's character perfectly, and Caroline Mutel's summoning of the infernal deities is as gripping as Véronique Gens's on the latter's first 'Tragédiennes' CD (Virgin, 8/06). The booklet is attached to the set, making the whole thing unwieldy, and the libretto-cum-translation doesn't mark the track numbers. Such annoyances are not serious enough to preclude a wholehearted recommendation.

Richard Lawrence

R Strauss

Arabella

Jacquelyn Wagner *sop*..... Arabella

Agneta Eichenholz *sop*..... Zdenka

James Rutherford *bar*..... Mandryka

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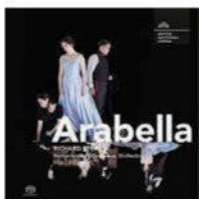




Susanne Elmark as the Fiakermilli in Christof Loy's production of *Arabella*, now released on Challenge Classics CD

Alfred Reiter *bass*.....Count Waldner
Charlotte Margiono *sop*.....Adelaide
Will Hartmann *ten*.....Matteo
Marcel Reijans *ten*.....Count Elemer
Roger Smeets *bar*.....Count Dominik
Thomas Dear *bass*.....Count Lamoral
Susanne Elmark *sop*.....Fiakermilli
Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra /
Marc Albrecht

Challenge Classics ③ ④ CC73686 (164' •
 DDD/DSD • S/T/t). Recorded live at Dutch National
 Opera, Amsterdam, April 23, 25 & 27, 2014



Hot on the heels of
 Oehms's excellent new
Die Frau ohne Schatten
 (12/15), here comes

another Strauss opera on (audio-only) disc captured live during staged anniversary-year performances. In this case it's *Arabella*, Strauss and Hofmannsthal's flawed final collaboration. Flawed not least because the librettist died tragically in 1929 having finalised the text of the first act only. Hofmannsthal never saw Strauss's enthusiastic telegram thanking him for that revised text: he died of a massive stroke as he readied himself to go to the funeral of his son, who had committed suicide.

Strauss went on to set the rest of the libretto as it stood, the project taking on a deeply personal dimension.

The result is an opera that is undoubtedly uneven: the first act is beautifully balanced, the final two – occasionally elided in a 'two act' version grudgingly sanctioned by Strauss – feel rather more provisional. Worse, perhaps, is the fact that this opera, though it ostensibly set out to recapture the success of *Der Rosenkavalier* in its Viennese milieu (though situated, chronologically speaking, a century later) and waltz-infused score, fails to contextualise the more idealised elements of its plot – Zdenka's cross-dressing, Arabella's uncomfortable submission to the mysterious stranger Mandryka – within an ironising frame as the earlier work did.

Submit to it, however, and the opera has its irresistibly moving moments: Arabella's monologue and duet with Zdenka in Act 1; the final reconciliation between her and Mandryka, in which Strauss's tender, bittersweet score makes us forget how clunkily the denouement has been engineered. The finest achievement in this new recording is probably that it brings out the very best in the work. Those key moments register with the necessary emotional power, but conductor Marc

Albrecht never feels indulgent. By the same token, he rattles through Act 2 without ever feeling unduly hasty; Act 3 is helped along by a few minor cuts. Albrecht's orchestra, though not quite a match for Christian Thielemann's supreme Staatskapelle Dresden on the DVD of the Salzburg Easter Festival's 2014 production, plays with considerable virtuosity and warmth, revealing a great deal of the score's bustling inner detail and melismatic counterpoint.

We have a fine cast on hand, too, headed by a serenely lovely Arabella from Jacquelyn Wagner, whose creamy soprano, though occasionally threatening to go off pitch, is stretched only in the higher-lying parts of 'Und du wirst mein Gebieter sein' in Act 2. Agneta Eichenholz matches her well as a cleanly sung and charming Zdenka. Things are little less clear-cut among the men, with James Rutherford making a rather avuncular and burly-sounding Mandryka; he has the notes but is short on *Heldenbariton* charisma and allure. Admittedly, though, this might in part be down to the recorded sound, which offers little air around the voices.

Will Hartmann is not the first to be stretched by the part of Matteo, nor is Susanne Elmark the first to fail to persuade

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If future seasons are at this level then the other major country-house outfits – the Three Gs – had better look to their laurels

Warwick Thompson The Classical Source July 2015



Slow-burn opera: Juha Tralla as Prince Myshkin in Mieczysław Weinberg's *The Idiot*, at the Mannheim National Theatre

us of the dubious charms of the Fiakermilli. Alfred Reiter and Charlotte Margiono lead the secondary cast with vivid performances as Arabella's dotty, desperate parents.

Those already owning studio *Arabellas* – Solti's or Sawallisch's, for instance, neither without its faults – might not feel compelled to seek this new one out. There's plenty to like here, though, in a performance that comes across well on disc: a persuasive *Arabella* that is well worth hearing. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

Thielemann (2/15 (CMAf) DVD 717208, Blu-ray 717304

Weinberg



The Passenger

Michelle Breedt *mez* Lisa
Roberto Saccà *ten* Walter
Elena Kelessidi *sop* Martha
Artur Ruciński *bar* Tadeusz
Svetlana Doneva *sop* Katja
Liuba Sokolova *mez* Bronka
Angelica Voje *mez* Krystina
 Prague Philharmonic Choir; Vienna Symphony

Orchestra / Teodor Currentzis

Stage director **David Pountney**

Video director **Felix Breisach**

ArtHaus Musik (P) (C) 2 DVD 108 079; (P) Blu-ray 109 080
 (161' + 29' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0,

DD5.0 & PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Bregenz Festival 2010

From Neos Blu-ray NEOS51005

Weinberg

The Idiot

Juhan Tralla *ten* Myshkin
Steven Scheschareg *bar* Rogozhin
Ludmila Slepneva *sop* Nastassya Filippovna
Bryan Boyce *bass* Totsky
Lars Møller *bar* Lebedjev
Bartosz Urbanowicz *bass-bar* Epanchin
Elzbieta Ardām *contr* Epanchina
Anne-Theresa Møller *mez* Aglaya
 Orchestra of the Mannheim National Theatre /
 Thomas Sanderling

Pan Classics (M) (C) 3 PC10328 (3h 28' • DDD • S/T/t)

Recorded live, January 12 & 31, 2014



There are any number of Russian operas after Prokofiev but not too many that have been staged in the West, and fewer still that seem likely to hold a place in the repertoire. As things stand, the first of

Weinberg's seven would seem to have a better chance than most, having already done the rounds of London, Warsaw, Houston, Chicago, Karlsruhe and Frankfurt. Filmed at the Bregenz Festival during the first run in 2010, *The Passenger* has been available for some time on the Neos label, and it is something of a surprise to see it reappear now from ArtHaus, sadly minus the synopsis, the libretto and most of the production photos. Thankfully the informative 30-minute documentary (to which, I should disclose, I make a couple of brief contributions) has been retained, and if there was some obstacle in the way of Neos's distribution, at least this new incarnation keeps this extremely important opera in circulation.

The libretto is reworked from Zofia Posmysz's novella about an ex-Auschwitz guard who re-encounters one of her captives 15 years after the war on a cruise ship (hence the title), and is forced to relive her suppressed memories. Now aged 92 and herself a former inmate, Posmysz is Roman Catholic. The libretto – by musicologist and literary advisor to Shostakovich, Alexander Medvedev – emphasises the international dimension by placing individuals from half a dozen

nations among the Auschwitz population. David Pountney's production takes this idea a stage further by having the text sung in as many different languages. All this has the effect of reducing the Jewish dimension of Auschwitz to virtually zero, and this has been, and will doubtless continue to be, a bone of contention. But it is worth bearing in mind that without Medvedev and Weinberg's emphasis on universality, endorsed somewhat reluctantly by Posmysz herself, the chances of a production in the Soviet Union at the time of composition (the late 1960s) would also have been close to nil. As it was, plans for staging at the Bolshoi apparently fell foul of intervention 'from above', ostensibly on the grounds of the work's 'abstract humanism'.

David Pountney and his set designer Johan Engels are faithful to the main concepts of the libretto, setting the post-war scenes on an upper level and sending the camp guard down to the depths for her memories of Auschwitz. Apart from the chorus, who observe and commentate in Greek-tragedy fashion, the staging is realistic and, as a result, as moving as it should be, especially when the screw tightens in the later scenes.

Weinberg might well have made modifications and cuts earlier on had he seen the opera in rehearsal, but even as it stands his pacing is masterful. However, there is one crucial moment where the Bregenz presentation is seriously open to question. This comes in the penultimate scene, where the male inmate, Tadeusz, defies the camp commandant by performing the Bach Chaconne in place of the popular waltz as ordered. Here Medvedev and Weinberg jolt the drama from the realistic to the symbolic by having the music performed by the entire body of orchestral violins in unison and for an unfeasible length of time, before Tadeusz is dragged away and his instrument smashed. The effect, as registered in the first concert performance, given in Moscow in December 2006, is a shattering denunciation of barbarism. But not here, because Pountney has the Chaconne played onstage by a lone soloist, in front of a commandant who soon falls asleep from boredom, thus trivialising one of the most highly charged scenes in all opera.

Having said that, without Pountney's advocacy *The Passenger* might never have been staged at all. The Bregenz production had the knife-edge atmosphere of a major rediscovery, and it features strong performances from most of the principals and from the Vienna Symphony Orchestra under Teodor Currentzis (most of whom

have a distinct edge over their counterparts at the ENO performances in September 2011). The entire thing is superbly recorded and filmed.

If Weinberg's first opera is essentially comprehensible without a synopsis, his last certainly needs it: unless, that is, you are familiar with Dostoevsky's 900-page novel about the ailing and impoverished (though with prospects of a substantial legacy) Prince Myshkin. Kind-hearted to a fault and hence dubbed an 'Idiot', Myshkin returns to Russia from a convalescence in Switzerland and starts by visiting distant relatives in St Petersburg. There he meets, among others, the femme fatale Nastassya Filippovna. After many twists and turns, Nastassya is finally dispatched by one of her various unsavoury suitors, Rogozhin. Seemingly able to understand and forgive even this appalling act, Myshkin is seen reconciled with the murderer at the end. Dostoevsky's own ending was rather different, but this adaptation – again by Medvedev – makes for a profoundly moving conclusion to a compellingly subtle psychological study.

Without the visual aspect – remarkably effective, as anyone present at the Mannheim performances can testify – many will probably find this a long haul, the more so because the score eschews the dramatic immediacy of *The Passenger*, and because not all the principal voices fall gratefully on the ear (though Juhan Tralle as Myshkin and Ludmila Slepneva as Nastassya are outstanding). But *The Idiot* has a slow-burn quality, and the longer you stay the course, the more you are likely to realise that Weinberg's unflashy, flexible yet consistent harmonic language, with its Brittenish command of extended tonality, provides a superb mirror of Myshkin's tortured soul.

The Mannheim orchestra is understandably stretched by the immensely demanding and in places very exposed scoring, and there are some patches of approximate synchronisation between stage and pit that would have been ironed out under studio conditions. Still, Thomas Sanderling's unhurried, solicitous conducting pays handsome long-term dividends.

Along with the complete libretto (in four languages) and synopsis, Pan has reproduced the three 'back stories' helpfully provided in the original Mannheim Theatre booklet. The recording finds an effective balance between voices and instruments, and moments of stage-shifting noise and the occasional audible prompt are only minimally distracting.

David Fanning

'Russian Arias'

Borodin Prince Igor – Konchakovna's Cavatina
Glinka Ivan Susanin – Vanya's Aria **Dargomizhsky**
 The Stone Guest – Laura's First Song **Mussorgsky**
 Boris Godunov – Marina Mnischev's Aria.
 Khovanshchina – Marfa's Song **Rimsky-Korsakov**
 The Snow Maiden – Dance of the Skomorokhi. The
 Tsar's Bride – Lyubasha's Monologue **Tchaikovsky**
 Eugene Onegin – Olga's Aria. The Maid of Orléans
 – Joan of Arc's Aria. The Queen of Spades –
 Prelude; Polina's Aria; Countess's Aria
Vesselina Kasarova *mez* **Baden-Baden**
Philharmonic Orchestra / **Pavel Baleff**
 Genuin © GEN15378 (59' • DDD • T/t)



Despite moves into heavier roles in recent years (Eboli, Dalila and Carmen),

the Bulgarian mezzo-soprano Vesselina Kasarova is still better known as a *bel canto* and Handel specialist. Therefore a disc of Russian arias is a bit of a surprise move and one that has its fair few hits and misses. There is plenty of formidable heft in her lower register, which makes easy work of Tchaikovsky's Joan of Arc. However, Kasarova's tone verges towards the treacly, which makes her sound rather too matronly for such ingénue roles as Olga (*Eugene Onegin*) and Polina (*The Queen of Spades*), both of which she sang early in her career.

There is a rather 'old school' Slavic wobble for the listener to surmount, which makes her Konchakovna (*Prince Igor*) unsexy. Kasarova tries to lighten her voice as Marina (*Boris Godunov*), but it's too breathy, with huge leaps between head and chest registers. She concludes Marina's aria with a pantomime-witch cackle, which isn't quite the effect I imagine Mussorgsky had in mind.

Far better are her imperious Marfa (*Khovanshchina*), darkly coloured, and her *Queen of Spades* Countess, where her plummy tone helps to present a formidable character before she reins it in for the Countess's Grétry aria. Lyubasha's unaccompanied song from Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Tsar's Bride* is given a haunting rendition, and Laura's light-hearted aria from Dargomizhsky's *The Stone Guest* is fun, its accompaniment drawn from Glinka's *Jota aragonesa*.

The Philharmonie Baden-Baden under Pavel Baleff play attentively. The Prelude from *The Queen of Spades* as a 'filler' makes sense, placed before the two vocal numbers from the same opera, but the Dance of the Tumblers is a perplexing conclusion to this uneven disc.

Mark Pullinger

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

CALLAS ON THE SMALL SCREEN

Mike Ashman revisits three films offering snapshots of the great soprano in action, now available on Blu-ray



Maria Callas's artistry shines through in Blu-ray reissues from Warner Classics

These performances were first issued on DVD in these combinations more than a decade ago. In this instance Blu-ray has not worked its habitual magic on old black-and-white stock, and neither picture nor sound (from the original early 2000s remastering) has improved by leaps and bounds. Nor are there any extras. There are the foibles of live performance. Callas is human after all: she forgets words in the *La Vestale* aria and the Habanera, and suffers dodgy high notes (the *Cenerentola* finale). But there are wonders here, too, not least before she actually sings, where, concert or not, she uses orchestral introductions grippingly to immerse herself in, almost to act out, the mood of the coming scena. Here is Verdi's work-distinguishing *tinta* – and those of the other composers – enshrined to the life.

Of the performances, Paris 1958 has the most atmosphere despite being the least accident-free. The conductor Georges Sebastian does not seem much at home in this material, least of all in extracts from *Norma* (where the score-reading chorus sound as lost as they do offstage in the *Trovatore* Miserere) and *Barbiere*, and he is a measurable distance away from agreeing with Gobbi's Scarpia about rubato in extracts from *Tosca*. The Puccini also suffers from last-minute non-production: poor wigs (for tenor Louis Rialland)

and noses (Gobbi), and a nearly comic accidental walk-on in the sky on Scarpia's balcony. In the heat of the moment Albert Lance, a late substitute as Cavaradossi, runs into French in his 'L'alba vindice appar' outburst.

Nonetheless, a showcase programme cunningly covering a whole range of emotions and techniques remains Callas's evening. It's hard to gainsay the overdubbed commentator who announces that 'a success has now become a triumph'. Even in an (apparently) shiny red evening gown, Callas clearly enacts the tension of the compromised priestess in 'Casta diva' (some start to the evening!), and builds – both by voice and by her whole way of standing – waiting for condemned Manrico in the Verdi into a truly spooky event. Her singing in *Tosca*'s Act 2 (much more comfortable and fuller-toned than in London six years later) and beautiful ultra-French costuming manage to transcend the score-ignorant camerawork and staging.

London 1964 is still the nearest we get to a properly rehearsed Callas live on stage in opera, an excerpt from the Royal Opera's then-new Franco Zeffirelli *Tosca* staging (and perhaps a trailer for the film of the opera he wanted to make with her). If Gobbi remains a touch melodramatic – the Scarpia-as-sadist show – it all hangs together much better than in Paris. By

intentional contrast, Callas – at least until 'Vissi d'arte' and the murder – does much by doing very little gesture-wise, relishing the text and, *pace* some reviews, embodying a woman steering her way through a man's world first, and a diva second. No one – not even Callas herself in earlier career – gets so much venomous description into 'E ucciso da una donna'. Tighter and less free than in 1958, the voice is still very much OK and – an important advantage – emotionally quite inseparable from its owner's stage presence. But someone should have told the cameraman in both cities that that knife on the table is rather an important prop in *Tosca*.

The London disc also previews 'Callas is Carmen', a couple of years before the complete recording of the role that many Intendants had hoped to secure. Despite Georges Prêtre's committedly militaristic (and strangely unfeeling) conducting, Callas makes as much of the role as if she'd long owned it. Her Séguedille is saltily, lethally heartless in its rejection of the lover to whom she almost forgot she'd shown the door: José be warned. London here is better than Hamburg – and the Hamburg concerts (with the telling exception of a new repertoire item, Eboli's 'O don fatale') generally have a rather stiff best-bib-and-tucker, 'let's behave, we're in Germany' feel about them. The *Cenerentola* finale is overblown and unsmiling, while 'Ernani, involami' is denied its cabaletta. Elsewhere (in 1959, and apparently battling a cold) Callas's sheer concentration and musical attack lift the edited assemblage of Bellini's *Il pirata* finale into music drama worthy of the composer's later works. There is also a cabaletta-less *Macbeth* 'Vieni t'affretta' (but not even Callas can 'read' the letter properly) and a spacious 'Tu che la vanità'.

These broadcasts remain unique opera documents of a great artist in action and Warner is guarding its EMI heritage well by making them freshly available in the best current media dressing. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



'Maria Callas Toujours - Paris 1958'

Warner Classics 2564 60541-5



'Maria Callas at Covent Garden - London 1962 & 1964'

Warner Classics 2564 60544-0



'Maria Callas in Concert - Hamburg 1959 & 1962'

Warner Classics 2564 60542-3

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

Nikolai Malko live

Broadcast performances from the Itter Collection that augment the conductor's studio discography

Lyrta's well-transferred collection of BBC broadcasts (1957-60) featuring the Corporation's Symphony Orchestra under the direction of **Nikolai Malko**, part of the Itter Broadcast Collection, has to be one of the most significant 'historical' orchestral releases in recent years. There are of course various commercial discs with Malko, most notably Prokofiev's Seventh, Tchaikovsky's Fourth and Dvořák's *New World* Symphonies, as well as the complete *Slavonic Dances* (the latter out on Magdalen), all of them vital, keenly observed performances.

Here, though, we have the Russian-born maestro captured in full flight. The principal novelty is *The Spinning Room*, a one-act theatre piece by Kodály fashioned after Hungarian/Transylvanian folksongs that received its first full production in Budapest in 1932. Unlike the better-known Singspiel *Háry János*, *The Spinning Room* has no spoken narrative. The story unfolds to reveal folk rituals that reflect aspects of village life and although, as Lyrta's excellent annotator Rob Barnett reminds us, two Hungarian recordings under János Ferencsik (both from the Hungaroton stable) offer a local slant on this delightful score, this English version sounds so idiomatic that you soon forget the language transposition. Musically a sort of 'Delius in Galánta' with touches of Enescu thrown in for good measure (the unison opening especially), there are many wonderful moments, especially the duet 'From far distant snow-carpeted mountains' (beautifully sung by soprano Elizabeth Simon and tenor Duncan Robertson), the many folk-inspired songs and choruses, and memorable contributions from Norma Procter and Owen Brannigan. I can't remember enjoying 'opera in English' quite as much on any previous occasion.

The remainder of the set is purely orchestral, opening with a weighty, romantically inclined account of Tchaikovsky's *Little Russian*, the first movement's central *Allegro vivo* dark and flexible, the heavily stressed semiquaver opening of the Scherzo (on cellos and basses) acting as launch pad for the cantering violins and violas thereafter. Quite unlike anyone else's, this. The same CD also includes Shostakovich's First Symphony, a work that Malko premiered in 1926. Again tempos are somewhat slower than we've come to expect nowadays, although the Scherzo packs a fair punch, with well-

Here we have the Russian-born maestro Nikolai Malko captured in full flight

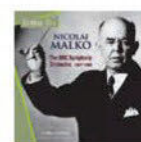
built *crescendos* always a strong point in Malko's performances. The moody finale is particularly impressive, the opening episodes extremely well paced. Here Malko makes a man of the teenager, granting this wonderful work a level of mature appreciation it receives only too rarely. Haydn's *The Hen*, a sizeable boiler by the sounds of it, resembles the marmoreal Haydn performances of, say, Bernstein and Scherchen, though the last two movements have plenty of life to them. This is Beethovenian Haydn, and none the worse for that, though it's not a view of the music I'd want to visit too often.

Khovanshchina's 'Dawn on the Moscow River' is atmospherically played and the *Tsar's Bride* Overture (with the LSO this time) achieves just the right balance between drama (impressive *crescendo*-ing brass) and soaring lyricism. Best of all on the second disc is Rimsky's *Antar*, which features tellingly judged timpani beats near the opening, the line slowly ascending from

lower strings to high woodwinds. Beyond some short-term drama and fluttering woodwinds, the *Allegro giocoso* is elegantly played (6'02"), the balance between winds and strings gauged to perfection. The sinister *Allegro* that follows, with its premonitions of Glière's *Ilya Muromets*, and the celebratory fourth movement bear witness to Malko's firm sense of rhythm and the symphony closes in a mood of peaceable romance.

Malko's Bruckner Seventh takes due care over counterpoint, always important with this composer: beam up from 3'44" into the first movement to see how effectively he attends to his string choirs, while the movement's closing minutes are stupendous, from the arching coda at 17'45" to the final pages – as humbling a rendition of this music as any you're likely to find within a 20-year radius. The broadly paced *Adagio* breathes with sublime simplicity, its opening pages calmly rather than emotively stated, the second subject picking up just a little in terms of pace. The principal climax (with percussion) is uplifting, with Malko leaning back noticeably before the big moment arrives. The Scherzo's outer sections are vigorous, the Trio unexpectedly played *con amore*; the finale presents an assortment of tempi and dynamics, the bullish, brass-dominated second idea especially impressive, the closing pages, as with the first movement's peroration, very much a broad, epic vision. Minor tape imperfections and playing fluffs notwithstanding, this is a musically enriching set and our experience of Nikolai Malko's art is duly extended.

THE RECORDING



Various Cpsrs Orch Wks
(bp1957-60)
BBC SO / Nikolai Malko
Lyrta © ④ REAM2120



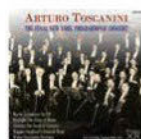
Captured in full flight: Nikolai Malko

Toscanini at white heat

If Malko's BBC broadcasts, fine as they are and well worth preserving, have hardly become the stuff of legend, **Arturo Toscanini's** 1945 'Pension Fund Concert' with the New York Philharmonic Symphony certainly has. The whole programme has enjoyed the benefit of various reissues, initially as a two-LP set released by the Toscanini Society and most recently as a skilfully aired, single-CD transfer on Pristine Audio. Bearing in mind that at the time of giving the concert Toscanini was not far short of his 77th birthday, the performances are electrifying beyond belief. One point is of particular interest: in the Trio of the *Clock* Symphony's Minuet, when the flute melody arrives and the accompanying strings doggedly refuse to rise to the implied harmony (they do second time around), Toscanini observes the 'joke', which he hadn't done on his 1929 New York Philharmonic 78s and wouldn't do on his recording with the NBC SO of 1946. What we have here is a taut, fiery performance, elegantly pointed in the gentler music and with a wide scale of dynamics that even the relatively constricted sound can't mask. Respighi's *The Pines of Rome* opens to remarkably vivid aural spray – high frequencies are unexpectedly clear – whereas the closing 'Pines of the Appian Way' tenses by stages so that the home straight is overwhelming...the bass drummer thwacking away hell for leather. Drama of a quite different kind darkens Siegfried's Death and Funeral March and *The Swan of Tuonela*, both of them giving the lie to the notion that Toscanini invariably favoured faster tempos. He certainly didn't

on this occasion. The concert draws to a blazing conclusion with Weber's *Euryanthe* Overture and you can appreciate why the audience went wild – though thankfully for this transfer the various bouts of applause have been skilfully truncated. A fabulous concert whichever way you hear it, and if you already have another transfer, Pristine Audio offers an extra layer of clarity.

THE RECORDING



Various Cpsrs The Final New York Philharmonic Concert
New York Philh SO / Toscanini
Pristine Audio (M) PASC454

Busch complete edition

Violinist/conductor **Adolf Busch** was very much in the Toscanini mould: a principled, strong-minded classicist with his eye consistently on the musical ball. Warner's 16-CD collection of its complete Busch, Busch Quartet, Busch Trio and Busch Chamber Players recordings, presented in sound that tops its various rivals (and there have been a good many of them), will prove a revelation to those who don't as yet know them. Pride of place in any library must go to the late Beethoven quartets, the *Grosse Fuge* played in Weingartner's arrangement for full string band (sadly Busch's heartfelt, well-built versions of Op 59 Nos 1 and 2 – previously released by Biddulph – have not been included, presumably for copyright reasons). But no group on disc has ever sustained the opening of Op 131 quite as effectively as the Busch did in March 1936, while few violinists make a stronger case for

expressive *portamento* than Busch does, the whole group weeping through the falling cadences that close the slow movement of Brahms's First Quartet with a unique sense of pathos. Schubert fares especially well: the E flat Piano Trio is both bracing and, in the second movement, closer in spirit to *Winterreise* than it's ever sounded before (or since), a claim that could be made with equal justification for performances of the last two quartets. Adolf's son-in-law Rudolf Serkin brings a measure of youthful energy to selected Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert and Schumann duo sonatas and in magnificent performances of Brahms's Second Piano Quartet and Piano Quintet. And there are the Bach performances from the Busch Chamber Players, which, in their clarity and tautness, are actually closer in spirit to recently modified conceptions of Baroque performance practice than you might expect. Busch's *Brandenburgs* and Suite are rhythmically firm, with keen-edge *staccatos*, and where appropriate warmly phrased. There's much else besides, of course, and I hope that Sony releases a counterstrike with a more modest box of its own Busch recordings (including Handel's Op 6 Concerti grossi).

THE RECORDING



Various Cpsrs Complete
Warner Recordings
Adolf Busch & Ensembles
Warner Classics
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Pianists live in Lucerne

I was delighted to encounter Audite's CD of a riveting Lucerne Festival performance of Schumann's Piano Concerto by **Annie Fischer** with the Philharmonia under Carlo Maria Giulini (more assertive than the commercial version she made with Klemperer). Forceful, cleanly articulated and with a poetically charged Intermezzo, it's a performance that shows Fischer to have been a notably strong, intellectual player. The coupling finds **Leon Fleisher** tackling Beethoven's Fourth Concerto with George Szell conducting the Swiss Festival Orchestra. A good pairing for Fischer's Schumann, this: both players are well equipped technically and musically compelling. Good, forwardly-balanced mono sound throughout.

THE RECORDING



Schumann Pf Conc
Beethoven Pf Conc No 4
A Fischer, Fleisher
Audite (C) AUDITE95 643

Books



Geraint Lewis reads a revealing new Vaughan Williams biography:

'The additional love story which now emerges is painted without technicolour highlighting, and Alldritt never judges or moralises'



Kate Molleson on a reassessment of Nadia Boulanger's influence:

'The degree to which Boulanger came to consecrate Stravinsky has provided plenty of musicological gossip and gender prejudice'

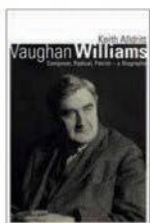
Vaughan Williams

Composer, Radical, Patriot

By Keith Alldritt

Robert Hale, HB, 384pp, £25

ISBN 978-0-7198-0937-8



Late in 1975 the 86-year-old Sir Adrian Boult delivered a blistering account of Walton's First Symphony at the Royal Festival Hall. Invited by the BBC to repeat it at the 1976 Proms, the veteran conductor declined, saying 'somehow I couldn't face all that malice a second time'. Keith Alldritt's new biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams reports an encounter between the two composers at the offices of their publisher. 'I suppose the old buffer is going to monopolise him all morning,' muses Walton to the junior staff, and once inside with the power says, 'well, the old pussy cat has gone at last,' having, nevertheless, just received the pussy cat's characteristic apology for keeping him waiting! Walton then continues: 'Of course VW was a really big pussy with very sharp claws...and the biggest intriguer of the lot.' Suffice to say that the office girls outside had the situation in a nutshell: 'VW was far nicer to W. than W. was to him, and W. is not considered to be a gentleman...'

It's odd how a man's music can, at one and the same time, both paint his portrait and unveil his soul. Vaughan Williams has all too easily been sanctified as a National Treasure. Over the past decade or so there has been a telling sea change in the general acceptance of VW as an international master whose time has finally come – but for purely musical reasons quite unrelated to his personal stature. And this welcome phenomenon will surely be explored with eloquence in the years to come. But do we really need yet another biography? Don't we already know all there is to know about the man himself?

Alldritt's book is necessary reading for one very specific reason. Until her

death at a ripe old 96 in 2007, Ursula Vaughan Williams, the composer's second wife and widow, was herself something of a national treasure (long before her neighbourly cameo in Alan Bennett's *The Lady in the Van* as played by Frances de la Tour). Adeline Vaughan Williams, VW's first wife, died in 1951 after 53 years of marriage. Ursula and Ralph then married – at a respectful distance – in 1953: Ralph was 80 and Ursula not quite 42. Yet their first meeting had been on March 31, 1938, to discuss a possible collaboration on a ballet – and though Ursula was only 27 at the time she had already been married to Michael Wood, a professional soldier, for five years. Ralph, at 65, was Britain's greatest living composer, well on the way to becoming the Grand Old Man of English music. But, reading between the lines of Ursula's official biography *R.V.W.* of 1964 and her autobiography *Paradise Remembered*, published in 2002, it was clear that there was probably much more to their friendship than met the eye...

Rather heroically, given the potentially sensational interest and vastly increased profile, Ursula suppressed the full story during her lifetime, dropping a few clues only towards the very end. Alldritt has now been able to collaborate with Janet Tennant, whose 'extensive and detailed research into the life and writings of Ursula Vaughan Williams' he acknowledges to have been like that of a 'co-author', and the result interweaves much unique and invaluable new material from documentary sources within the familiar outline very naturally and sensitively. The additional love story which now emerges is painted without technicolour highlighting, and the strength of Alldritt's approach is that he never judges or moralises. Nobody will read this book for its patchily simplistic musical insights and it is littered with factual howlers, avoidable repetition and quite terrible proof-reading. Most of these shortcomings should be corrected by an expert sub-editor before a new or paperback edition appears. But the crux remains. It is now absolutely clear that some of the greatest British music of the

20th century – right from the *Serenade to Music* in 1938 through the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies to *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Sinfonia Antartica* – was ultimately made possible by a remarkable partnership in which those who were intimately involved often sacrificed personal comfort for the greater good of a presiding genius. All of us who have gained thereby can only read, ponder and wonder. **Geraint Lewis**

Teaching Stravinsky

Nadia Boulanger and the Consecration of a Modernist Icon

By Kimberly A Francis

Oxford University Press, HB, 296pp, £29.99

ISBN: 978-0-1993-7369-7



Skim the title of Kimberly A Francis's new book and you could be forgiven for assuming that Igor

Stravinsky had at one point been a student of Nadia Boulanger. And why not? The *grande dame* of 20th-century French music pedagogy taught basically everyone: Aaron Copland, Elliott Carter, Daniel Barenboim, Philip Glass, Astor Piazzolla – heck, Quincy Jones. But she never taught Stravinsky, who was five years her senior and already on the brink of international stardom when she was first knocked sideways hearing his music (the Paris premiere of *The Firebird*) aged 23 in 1910. Two decades later, now a revered teacher at the Ecole Nationale, she did teach his son Soulima and thereby became Stravinsky's friend, advisor, ardent champion, sometime surrogate family member, maybe more. Theirs was a shifting and not always clearly defined relationship, and in Francis's hands it makes for engrossing reading.

The book's subtitle is full of enticingly loaded terms. The degree to which Boulanger came to consecrate Stravinsky as the 20th century's most important composer has provided plenty of musicological gossip and gender prejudice



In a man's world: Nadia Boulanger with (l to r) Arthur Honegger, Arthur Hoérée, Albert Roussel, Henri Prunières and Darius Milhaud on the ISCM jury in 1936

over the decades, and Francis rightly smarts at some of the more belittling epitaphs, including Virgil Thomson's 'musical midwife' or Robert Craft's 'prodigious proof-reader'. She laments what she sees as sexist sidelining in standard Stravinsky literature of a woman who threw her considerable cultural clout behind the composer's neo-classicism, crafted his public image, taught his works to generations of influential students and provided robust creative feedback.

We get ample glimpses of Boulanger's intellectual fierceness. Clearly she had a better mind for nitty-gritty than Stravinsky did, and it shows in her fastidious corrections of the *Symphony of Psalms*, *Dumbarton Oaks*, *Perséphone* and other drafts. But Francis also gives Boulanger credit for shaping Stravinsky's life choices as well as his artistic ones. She attributes his religious swing in the 1940s to Boulanger's arrival in California and infers that the rise of Robert Craft as close advisor to Stravinsky in the last two decades of his life filled a vacuum left by Boulanger's departure from the US after the Second World War. While Craft encouraged the composer towards serialism, 'Stravinsky needed to distance himself from tonality – and, by extension, one can only assume, from Boulanger'.

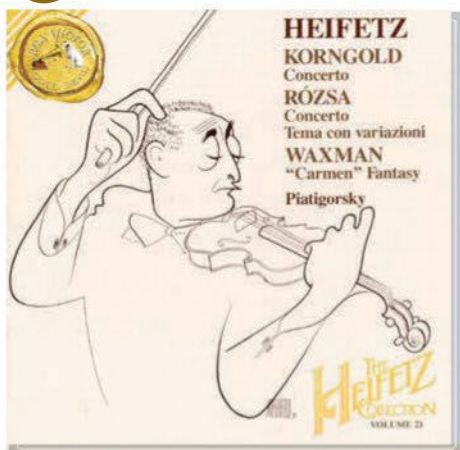
Francis declares her own colours early: 'This is first and foremost a feminist account of Boulanger's professional interactions with Stravinsky, his family, and his music,' she tells us, with due doffing-of-hat to feminist musicologists such as Marcia Citron, Annegret Fauser, Ellie Hisama, Carol Oja and Judith Tucker. It's hard to know what gender meant for Boulanger herself. Certainly her relationship to feminism wasn't straightforward: she believed a woman should only pursue a profession if absolutely necessary and that a career should never jeopardise the responsibilities of mother and wife – seemingly at odds with her lifelong pursuit of status and success. She never married, never had children.

The romance question is conscientiously dodged for a good half of the book, presumably to avoid dealing with standard assumptions that Boulanger was passionate about Stravinsky's music for reasons other than intellectual. Then on page 116 Francis finally confronts the matter outright: were they lovers? Rather deftly, she leaves the matter unresolved, instead simply noting the changing tone of correspondence from professional to intimate to frosty. She also includes the marvellously trivial detail that in July 1939, Stravinsky visited Boulanger at her country cottage and did his laundry

while there. (We know this because of a dry-cleaning receipt that lists two pairs of linen socks, three handkerchiefs, two pairs of boxer shorts and three shirts – two white, one yellow-brown – which to some commentators has been proof enough that naughty behaviour must have occurred.)

Francis's broader point that Stravinsky relied heavily on the movers and shakers around him is hardly a new one but she brings Boulanger closer into the fold than ever before. He needed her as much as she needed him. She secured commissions and promoted his music, bolstering his career and her own status as cultural taste-maker. It's a convincing case. The book ends with a more general plea that we shift musicological narratives away from the cult of the individual towards a more Bourdieusian acknowledgement of the interdependent people who make art happen. 'There has yet to be a large-scale use of Bourdieu within the historical musicological literature,' Francis points out, which maybe isn't surprising given collective attribution is an uncomfortable fit for an industry that likes to promote the myth of creative genius. By readdressing the Boulanger-Stravinsky dynamic, Francis has done her bit. **Kate Molleson**

Classics RECONSIDERED



Jeremy Nicholas and Rob Cowan discuss the world-premiere recording of Erich Korngold's Violin Concerto with Jascha Heifetz from 1953



Korngold

Violin Concerto in D, Op 35

Jascha Heifetz *vn* Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra / Alfred Wallenstein

RCA 09026 61752-2. From HMV ALP1288 (12/55)

Written by Erich Korngold, one-time *Wunderkind* composer and now for some years a film musician in America, in 1945 according to the sleeve-notes (1947 according to the Library of Congress catalogue), this concerto exhales a wistful Viennese flavour which may seem to some listeners a bit overdone. It is most ably written, with a particularly showy solo part, but there is more than a suspicion in places

of kitsch. The soulfulness of the second movement (the vibraphone cannot but sound lush, however tactfully played), with the solo violin high up in the rigging, veers between Szymanowski and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The finale, for all its obviousness of theme, has plenty of vitality, and is the vehicle for some of Heifetz's most terrific fiddling. Wallenstein secures masterly ensemble throughout, and on this side of the disc the recording is excellent.

Lionel Salter (12/55)

Korngold's Violin Concerto is a work that Heifetz championed in the years

immediately after the war and which he helped to establish. The concerto derives its thematic substance from some of the film scores Korngold composed during his years in Hollywood in the late 1930s and early 40s. [Korngold's] scoring is little short of masterly and however one may react to this work, there is no doubt as to the quality of its advocacy. Heifetz plays with miraculous brilliance and eloquence, and he is admirably supported by the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Alfred Wallenstein and a fine recording. It may be 20 years old but it certainly does not sound like it. **Robert Layton** (5/74)

Jeremy Nicholas For some reason I have always been fiercely defensive about this work and, despite his less than agreeable personality, the violinist who made the first recording of it. There was a time as late as the 1990s when some critics and broadcasters of a certain hue loved to look down their noses at Korngold in general and his Violin Concerto in particular. Why? Because he wrote film music (horror!) and the concerto uses four themes that Korngold had dreamt up originally for the silver screen (beyond the pale!).

How clever they were, these arbiters of musical taste, each time Korngold's music came up for discussion, to repeat that stale old canard 'More corn than gold' coined by critic Irving Kolodin in the *New York Sun* after the work's East Coast premiere. But to the case: for me, this recording of Korngold's Violin Concerto from January 10, 1953, made, appropriately, on Sound Stage 9 at Hollywood's Republic Studios, has never been surpassed.

Rob Cowan Well, with your last three words you've just about rendered my

contribution redundant, Jeremy. Anyone who has heard the teenage Korngold's Sinfonietta, which was keenly promoted by some of the greatest German maestros of the pre-war period (and here I'm talking both world wars), will know that Korngold's luscious style was well and truly in place a good 20 to 30 years before this – or the film music – was composed. I've never understood why critics have hurled verbal detritus at this wonderful music.

I remember years ago talking to the great violinist Louis Kaufman (the eloquent fiddle in classic scores for *Gone with the Wind*, *Wuthering Heights* and so on) and he seemed quite defensive about his 'weepy work'. Heifetz was of a like heart, and everyone after him who has played the Korngold, no matter how competent and 'silver-toned', sounds patronising. They take a 'naughty-but-nice' approach, guiltily pushing the calories, whereas Heifetz indulges that inimitable, lean but intense bitter-sweetness, that 'speaking tone' with its infinitely varied vibrato, toying with our emotions like some hot-breathed Lolita. He's 'the bizz' as they say. Korngold, like

Steiner and Waxman, knew the sort of fiddle sound he wanted (Kaufman, Seidel and Slatkin provided it), so there can't be any doubt that Heifetz is 'authentic'.

JN Absolutely, though of course Heifetz wasn't in the picture (if you'll pardon the pun) when Korngold began writing the concerto. Bronislav Huberman, a violinist of a very different type and temperament, provided the initial impetus, and the first two movements were written with him in mind. Also, Bronislav Gimpel claimed to have played the work before Heifetz (though this must have been in private and before it was complete, as Heifetz definitely had some influence on the technically demanding finale). The sound world of the whole score seems so empathetic with Heifetz's, I wonder if Korngold revisited what he had previously written once Heifetz was on board?

It's quite an exotic line-up for a violin concerto: apart from the inclusion of a bass clarinet, contrabassoon and celesta, there's a glockenspiel, xylophone, vibraphone, tubular bells, gong and bass drum. And



'Intensity': Heifetz's 'all-pervading presence sidelined the orchestra's contribution to a mere "accompaniment"'

here's the thing: though you'd be hard pressed to hear all these individually on this recording, does it matter?

RC I know, of course, that Heifetz wasn't 'in the picture', it's just that when it came to prompting a lump in the throat for the movies, his style was prototypical. Virtually every movie concertmaster followed his stylistic lead. It's worth noting too that there's a concert recording by Heifetz under Efrem Kurtz from March 1947 (out on Music & Arts), a performance given just six weeks after the premiere in February with Vladimir Golschmann in St Louis. Interesting that the balance there is rather more natural than it is on this famous version under Wallenstein – and the performance itself is, if anything, even more exciting.

You allude to the exotic scoring but for those of us brought up on that wonderful old vinyl album Heifetz's all-pervading presence sidelined the orchestra's contribution to a mere 'accompaniment' (as was quite often the case with Heifetz's orchestral records). Later recordings by the likes of Shaham, Mutter, Perlman, Schmid,

Znaider and Juillet – all exceedingly fine players – admit more in the way of subsidiary orchestral detail (Shaham and Previn being perhaps the most revealing in that respect). They all act as essential supplements to this classic. I suppose the most overwhelming aspect of Heifetz's performance – whether under Wallenstein or under Kurtz – is the intensity of those leaps into the instrument's upper regions, and the accuracy of his intonation. It's fearless playing,

JN Yes, and talking of which there is one particular moment I want to pinpoint in this recording – it's in the slow movement – which epitomises that intensity and which no other violinist achieves in quite the same way (and I'd add Benedetti, Hahn and Capuçon to your list of fine exponents of the Korngold). I would go so far as saying it is by a unique feature such as this (there are others) that Heifetz owns the concerto, a gesture helped by the much brisker tempo he chooses for this movement (Mutter and Shaham, both under Previn, for all their virtues are too indulgent for me).

The climax comes at bars 55 and 56 (5'09"–5'12") where Korngold takes the soloist soaring up to two Ds a couple of octaves above the stave. Compare the way Heifetz leans into these notes, how he bows them and then phrases the succeeding four semiquavers (nearly two octaves below) to how everyone else plays the same passage. It is only a fleeting detail but typical Heifetz. He makes the same effect at the climax of the slow movement of Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy* (with Steinberg and Sargent).

RC Yes, this is typical of the way Heifetz would hone a sequence of a mere few bars to such a high level of incandescence that no one else could come within miles of him. It's interesting, isn't it, that the passage you cite suits Heifetz to perfection.

You make the point that Huberman (who was, as you say, a sort of prime mover for the work) was 'a very different sort of violinist' and I find myself wondering whether he could have coped with 'two Ds a couple of octaves above the stave'. Much as I love his playing, as reported on disc, by the time Korngold was writing the piece Huberman's technical facility wasn't quite what it had been 20 or so years earlier. So I'd wager a bet that this and similar passages were the product of Heifetz's influence – if you've got it, flaunt it.

Think of his own transcriptions where the demands he places on himself (and on those who dare to compete with him) run roughly parallel with the high-flying demands of the concerto. There, too, the bottom line is maximum expressive intensity.

JN I'm sure you're right about Huberman. Having seen the first two movements, he wouldn't commit to a performance date, I think because the writing was technically beyond him. So Korngold invited another violinist round to have a go (Gimpel?) who made a complete hash of it, enough to dissuade Korngold from continuing. I have it on first-hand authority that Heifetz visited Gimpel and picked up the score of the concerto which was lying on Gimpel's piano and asked if he could have a look at it. It was only after this when Heifetz voiced his enthusiasm that Korngold's faith in the work was restored. Heifetz actually asked him to increase the technical demands of the finale!

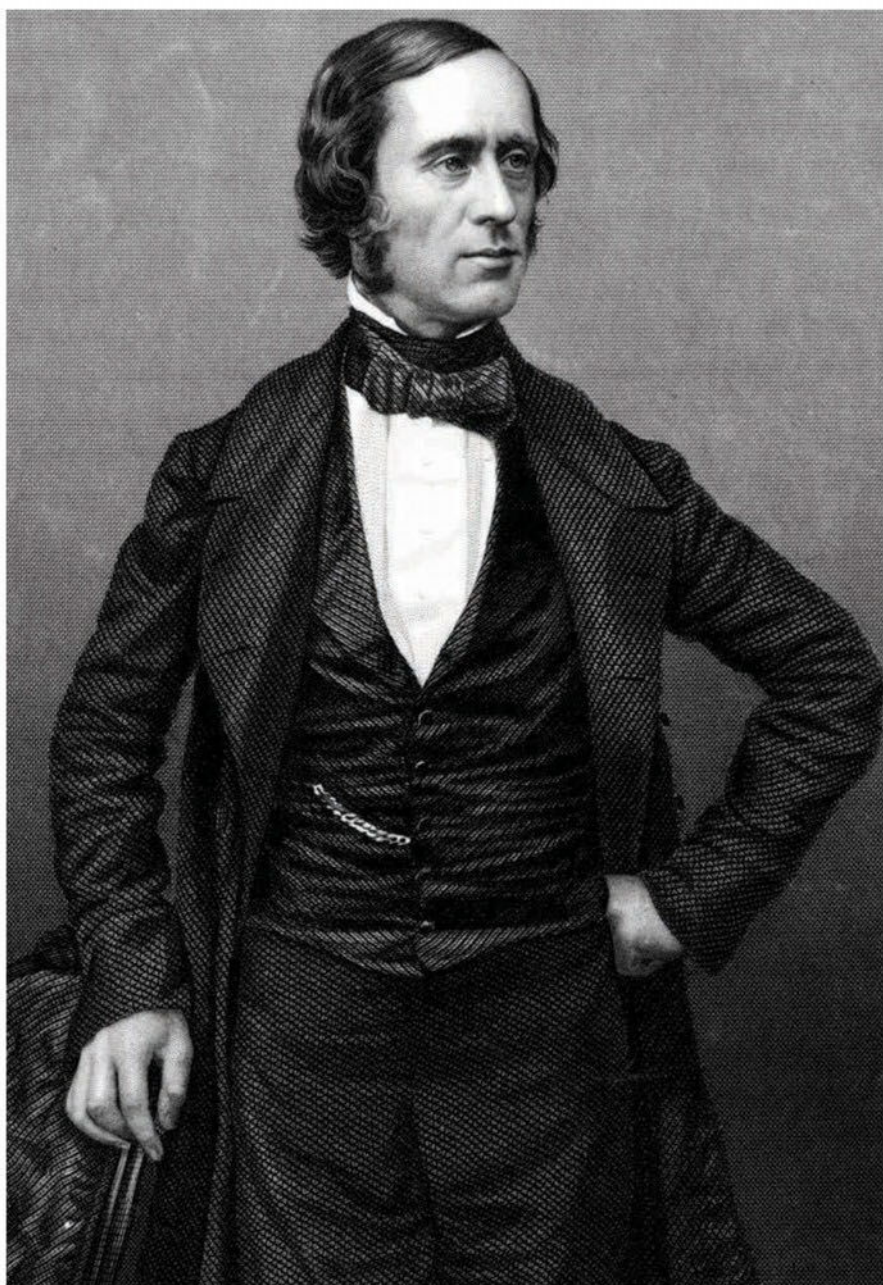
And how wonderful that the concerto – sidelined for so long – is now, if not staple repertoire, certainly no longer an oddity. Its deft orchestration, richly-rewarding, taxing solo part and succession of glorious themes make it one of the stand-out works of a remarkable composer. **G**

► Vilde Frang's new recording of the Korngold Violin Concerto is reviewed on page 24

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Forgotten works of Victorian Britain

The 19th century has traditionally been considered a low point in Britain in terms of musical creativity but, as **Jeremy Dibble** points out, with a little bit of detective work, there can be huge rewards in store



William Sterndale Bennett was recognised as a fine musician by Mendelssohn during a visit to London in 1833

This year marks the bicentenary of the birth of one of Britain's most neglected yet supremely talented composers.

Born in Sheffield in 1816, William Sterndale Bennett possessed sparkling gifts as a composer and a pianist which were recognised by Mendelssohn during a visit to London in 1833. Mendelssohn invited him to Leipzig (not as a pupil but as a friend), which led to accolades from the German public, including a young and up-and-coming Schumann who anticipated a bright future for the young Englishman. Yet, after further visits to Leipzig and successful performances of his orchestral works, Sterndale Bennett did not fulfil the creative fecundity hoped for by his contemporaries. His works are a reminder, however, that English music in the first part of the 19th century was by no means without value or inspiration (in this regard, we should ignore Oscar Schmitz's much-quoted, empty slogan 'Das Land ohne Musik' and the somewhat loose criticism of Ernest Walker's 1907 *A History of Music in England*).

It is true, perhaps, that Britain lacked the conditions and positive attitudes towards musical culture that were enjoyed more readily in Germany, France and Italy, but London's economic wealth and vitality were major attractions by which continental musicians could make a decent living, as either residents or visitors. Britain, then, was a musically cosmopolitan milieu from which numerous talents emerged, whether in the concert hall, the cathedral or opera. Our acquaintance with their works is scant, yet the more one hears, the more one is surprised by their accomplishments and inventiveness and by the sheer range of works that were composed (reflected in the fact that the selections opposite include multiple-work entries). This was no 'dark age', and Stanford, who knew Sterndale Bennett at Cambridge in the 1870s, surely had a point when he credited him (along with SS Wesley) as an architect of Britain's renewed artistic momentum. **G**

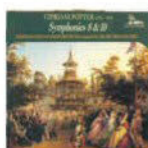
**Sterndale Bennett****Piano Concerto No 5 in F minor**Malcolm Binns *pf*

Philharmonia Orchestra /

Nicholas Braithwaite

Lyrita (11/90)

Sterndale Bennett's concertos are indebted to the London piano school - in this case, especially in its long symphonic orchestral ritornello and presentation of both first and second subjects. The graceful 'Romanza pastorale' ('A Stroll through the Meadows') is a tranquil jewel that amply encapsulates the composer's delicate balance of Classical and Romantic sensibilities.

**Potter****Symphony No 10 in G minor**

Milton Keynes Chbr Orch /

Hilary Davan Wetton

Unicorn-Kanchana (3/90)

Cipriani Potter (one of Sterndale Bennett's teachers at the Royal Academy of Music) wrote his Tenth Symphony for the Philharmonic Society in 1832. His symphonic music and piano concertos reflect his admiration for Beethoven, whom he counted among his friends. This fiery piece, full of unusual twists and turns, earned the praise of Wagner in 1855. The highly individual *Andante con moto* is particularly noteworthy for its poetic passages for solo violin and cello.

**Pierson****Macbeth, Op 54**

RPO / Barry Wordsworth

Lyrita (5/08)

The self-exiled Henry Hugo

Pierson (originally Pearson) initially took counterpoint lessons with TA Walmisley as a student in Cambridge before settling in Germany, where he established a reputation with his opera *Leila* (1848) and incidental music to *Faust* (1854). His *Macbeth* (1859) is often considered the first example of an English symphonic poem. Highly programmatic, the colourful score overflows with quotations and stage directions from Shakespeare's play.

**Macfarren****Chevy Chace**

English Northern Philharmonia

/ David Lloyd-Jones

Hyperion Helios (1/92)

George Macfarren's rhythmically dynamic *Chevy Chace*, a work written initially as a prelude to an eponymous melodrama in 1836, received its first performance as an overture in 1837, conducted by JW Davison. It was also conducted by Mendelssohn at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, where it was enthusiastically received. In 1855 it was heard at the Philharmonic Society in London, directed by Wagner, who in *Mein Leben* rejoiced in its 'peculiarly wild, passionate character'.

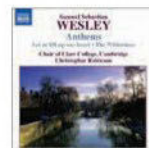
**Benedict****Piano Concertos - C minor, Op 45; E flat, Op 89**

Tasmanian SO /

Howard Shelley *pf*

Hyperion (10/09)

In 1835, German-born Hummel pupil Julius Benedict settled in London, where publication and performance opportunities were among the best in Europe. These virtuosic concertos (published 1852 and 1867 respectively) offer a fascinating fusion of Classicism and Romanticism in which Beethoven and Mendelssohn freely mingle. Op 45's *Andante pastorale* is notable for its surprising changes of tempo and tonality.

**Wesley****Let us lift up our heart**

Choir of Clare College,

Cambridge /

Christopher Robinson

Naxos (6/07)

This large-scale, full-with-verse anthem (c1836), written while Samuel Sebastian Wesley was organist at Exeter Cathedral, was conceived for four solo voices, eight-part choir and organ. It's by far the longest anthem on this CD (18'35") and more closely resembles a cantata. Its centrepiece is a magnificent section for solo baritone, 'Thou, O Lord God', which shows off Wesley's advanced harmony and treatment of dissonance.

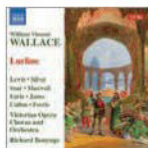
**Various composers****'British Opera Overtures'**

Victorian Opera Orchestra /

Richard Bonyng

Somm

This recording serves as a reminder of the operatic creativity Britain witnessed during the first part of the 19th century. Of particular note are the overtures to John Barnett's *The Mountain Sylph* (1834), Michael William Balfe's *The Siege of Rochelle* (1835), Edward Loder's *The Night Dancers* (1846) and Julius Benedict's *The Lily of Killarney* (1862), all of which, with their memorable themes, enjoyed considerable success and played to packed opera houses.

**Wallace****Lurline**

Sols; Victorian Opera Chorus

& Orchestra / Richard Bonyng

Naxos

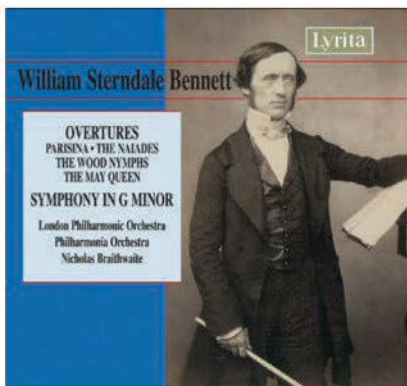
Named as a work of 'the highest distinction' by Berlioz, *Lurline* was first given in London in 1860 under the management of Pyne and Harrison, pioneers in the performance of opera in English. In 1890 it was successfully revived. A colourful character and widely travelled, William Vincent Wallace possessed a vibrant affinity with the theatre and, though *Maritana* remains his best-known stage work, this 'Grand Legendary Opera' is undoubtedly his most creative utterance.

**Sullivan****Symphony in E, 'Irish'.****Overture in C, 'In memoriam'.****The Tempest - Suite**

BBC PO / Richard Hickox

Chandos (3/01)

The Tempest suite (1860-61) was written while Arthur Sullivan was still a student at the Leipzig Conservatoire - where he was considered one of the most brilliant talents. It made his name in England when it was played there in 1862. This splendid recording includes the fine *Irish* Symphony (1863-66) and the Schubert-inspired *In memoriam*, works nowadays obscured by the later success of the composer's Savoy operas.

**Sterndale Bennett****Symphony in G minor, Op 43. The May Queen. The Wood Nymphs. The Naiades. Parisina**

London Philharmonic Orchestra; Philharmonia Orchestra / Nicholas Braithwaite Lyrita (10/07)

Between 1833, when Mendelssohn first heard his music in London, and 1842, there was an extraordinary outpouring of music from Sterndale Bennett. Inspired by Byron's poem, *Parisina* was written at the Royal Academy of Music when he was only 18 but gives us a flavour of that quintessential lyrical poetry that so appealed to Schumann. *The Naiades* (1836) and

The Wood Nymphs (1838), exquisitely scored, were completed in Germany, and *The May Queen*, written for a festival in Leeds, has an overture that was originally written in 1842 as *Marie du Bois*. For me, the enchanting Op 43 Symphony (1863-67) earns Sterndale Bennett the soubriquet of the 'Mozartian Romantic' for its poise, clarity and obvious tribute to the composer's Viennese hero.

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Chopin's *Berceuse*

This piano miniature requires great virtuosity but also subtlety, poetry and poise. In his assessment of the available recordings, **Bryce Morrison** discovers that only a select few make the grade

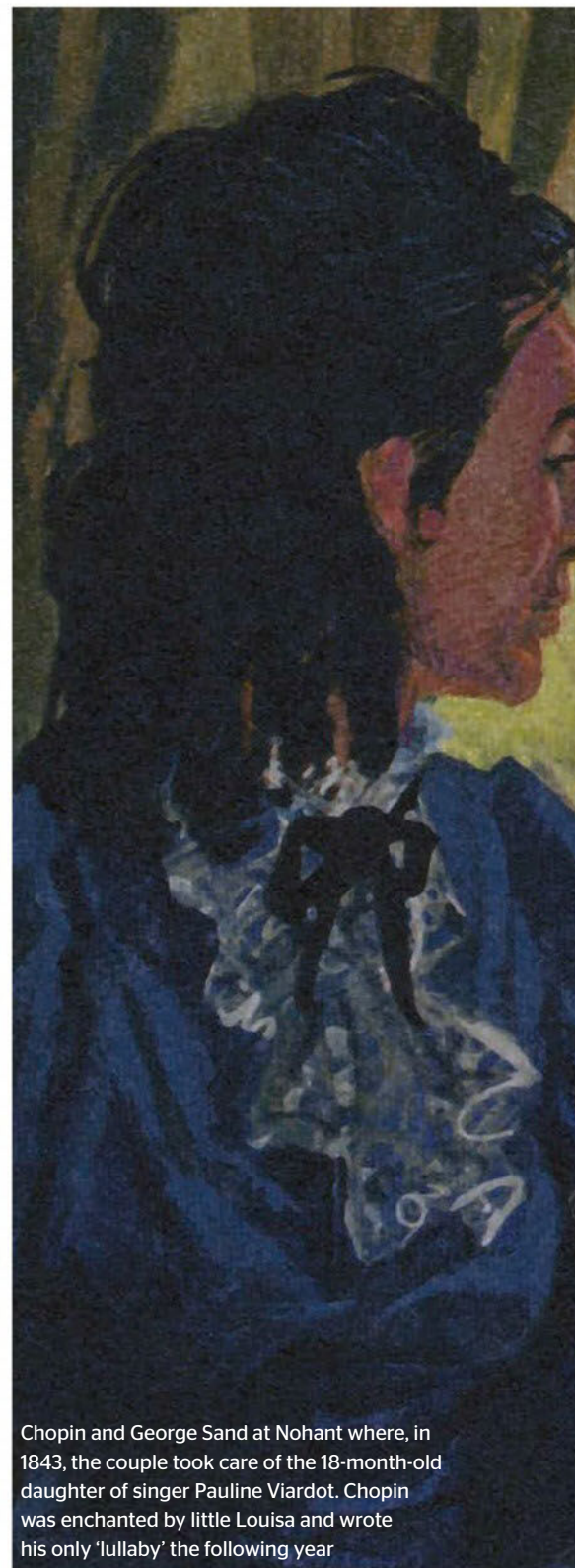
As far as I am aware, this is a first for the *Gramophone* Collection. After some gentle twisting of our Editor's arm he has allowed me to celebrate a miniature rather than an epic. For many, Chopin's *Berceuse* in D flat, Op 57, is a deeply personal love, a jealously guarded possession. Ever since its appearance in 1844 it has inspired the awe of virtually all pianists, a feeling that, as Goethe said, it is when working within limits that genius declares itself. This admiration ranges from academic commentary to ecstasy – the latter revealing a pressing need to express the inexpressible. To quote Keats, this is music to 'tease us out of thought'. For Lennox Berkeley, an English composer though one of Gallic grace and charm, in the *Berceuse* Chopin's French ancestry shines through the rarest blend of ornament and economy; 'No analysis,' he says, 'can give any idea of its compelling grace and charm.' Meanwhile, other commentators have soared into the empyrean. For Frederick Niecks, an early Chopin scholar, the *Berceuse* evokes Mercutio's dream speech in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, being 'in shape no bigger than an agate stone'; while for the ever-fanciful James Huneker, Chopin takes us from 'pigeon-egg blue to Nile green', and 'for a moment the sky is peppered with tiny stars' and there's a 'rain of silvery fire'. For Alexandre Dumas fils, the *Berceuse* is like the sensation following a Turkish bath, when 'the soul...goes wherever it lists, but always towards the Blue, into the dream-land'. Such estimates, while subjective at one level, are touching at another, but it takes that great scholar Charles Rosen to locate a truer focus and illumination: 'All overt excitement has been removed from virtuosity, leaving only the

breathless tension which is the homage paid to supreme grace.'

EARLY OVER-INTERFERENCE

So let me start with **Josef Hofmann**, most renowned of pianists, yet demonstrating in his 1937 live recording a marked preference for performer over composer, where Chopin is used as a springboard for personalised excess. As his greatest admirer Jorge Bolet told me on several occasions, 'We came to hear Hofmann rather than Chopin.' This suggests an ethos alien to our more puritan age, one in which, as Vladimir Ashkenazy has expressed, we are more music's servants than its masters. That Hofmann was a prodigious virtuoso is beyond question, but in the *Berceuse* he is the opposite of a virtuoso in Liszt's superb definition of the term: a true virtuoso 'must call up scent and blossom, and breathe the breath of life'. Both Godowsky and, later, Horowitz make a sharp distinction between mechanics and technique (ie virtuosity) in the real sense, but Debussy's ear focused on virtuosity in the worst sense: 'The attraction of the virtuoso for the public is very much like that of the circus for the crowd. There is always a hope that something dangerous may happen.' Fauré, too, expressed an even more marked distaste.

I make this point because even when you consider changes in taste and time, Hofmann's *Berceuse* suggests little beyond perversity, a flurried and blatant alternative to the composer's score. The final bars, in particular, which have less to offer busy fingers, are crudely insensitive, with an ugly bass reinforcement to round things off. **Ignaz Friedman**, another lion of the keyboard, is on alien ground in the *Berceuse*, despite



Chopin and George Sand at Nohant where, in 1843, the couple took care of the 18-month-old daughter of singer Pauline Viardot. Chopin was enchanted by little Louisa and wrote his only 'lullaby' the following year

his legendary way with the mazurkas. There is little concern here for much beyond empty note-spinning, and there is also a willingness to tamper with an already perfect score which reminds you that this was the age (1928) when the text was far from sacred.

I was once roundly criticised by the late Ronald Stevenson, a dear and admired



PHOTOGRAPHY: LOOK AND LEARN/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

friend, for failing to show proper respect for Ignacy Jan Paderewski. Paderewski was by all accounts a great statesman (he was Prime Minister of Poland in 1919) and a charismatic pianist who wove a spell over adoring admirers who would wait for hours to catch a glimpse of the noble profile as it sped past on a 'royal' train. But very few of his recordings, made late in

his career, suggest the qualities of warmth and magic admired by, most notably, Clifford Curzon. Paderewski's way with the *Berceuse* (originally on Pearl, nla, now available as part of a two-CD set on APR) is off with the hare and the hounds, conveying anxiety rather than serenity. Granted, Chopin's title '*Berceuse*' was an afterthought (it was originally called

'Variations'), but the hypnotic, lulling bass-line makes the work's established title, its mood and its spirit, inevitable. Of course, the exigencies of old recording techniques explain something of the tendency to hurry ('In those days you had to get off the mark with the clock,' Eileen Joyce once explained to me), and listening to a recording by **Benno Moiseiwitsch** (a pianist lavishly praised by Hofmann and Bolet), you are again made aware of a limited recording format. How else does one explain this most elegant and teasingly urbane pianist's seeming gratitude for the opportunity to chivvy Chopin's florid tracery?

Desynchronisation of the hands (a once fashionable way of accentuating and increasing the intensity of *cantabile*) is also characteristic of the pianist

Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, whose romantic freedom, of the sort celebrated by Cortot and Paderewski, is in marked contrast to his later imperious 'Prussian officer' severity. The *Berceuse* was among the many casualties in Michelangeli's fast-dwindling repertoire, but there is great affection, indeed warmth, here, even when his performance concludes with a heavy sense of intervention or 'interpretation'.

CRUCIAL INGREDIENTS STILL LACKING

By now, feeling the heat of an overcritical response, readers out of touch with past glory may well ask: what *are* the characteristics of a truly great performance of the *Berceuse*? Firstly, a steady, even pulse that is never rigid but subtly coloured and inflected. Secondly, an ability to treat Chopin's filigree not as a blaze of brilliance but as a gentle starlit sheen. Thirdly, in the final section, a sense of Chopin's audacity as he sends a foreign C flat chiming through that insistent D flat tonality, a gesture to shock the composer's contemporaries ('We implore Mr Chopin to return to nature,' said Ludwig Rellstab, a vindictive and blinkered German critic).

For Alfred Brendel, **Wilhelm Kempff** was like 'an Aeolian harp, ever ready to respond to whatever interesting wind blew his way', while, for US music critic Michael Steinberg, Kempff had 'a marvellous feeling for atmosphere, for the changing of light'. Kempff, then, may have been German but he was the least Teutonic of pianists. That said, he was an idiosyncratic Chopin pianist on less certain ground than he was in the great Viennese classics, Liszt and Fauré. But while there is nothing strange about either of his *Berceuse* recordings, they are both disappointingly literal.

Stefan Askenase was a Polish pianist and a Chopin specialist, yet his blunt way with



Chopin taught piano to Pauline Viardot, right, whose daughter probably inspired the Berceuse; the Viardots were close friends of Chopin and George Sand

the Berceuse shows that such attributes are no guarantee of authority. And this brings me to **Artur Schnabel**, the greatest of all Chopin pianists, who once gave an unforgettable performance of the Berceuse in the 1960s. How can one ever forget that shimmering thread of sound that floated across the vast space of London's Royal Festival Hall, as 'bright as fire in the mist' (Virginia Woolf). Sadly, his recording caught him on one of those rare days when he seemed indifferent to his beloved Chopin's greatness. Why so loud in the opening's gently rising questions? The playing, though not without that inimitable *cantabile* (Schnabel was the greatest of 'singer' pianists) and sophisticated inflection, is curiously glib, a smart

metropolitan alternative to his expected patrician ease and elegance.

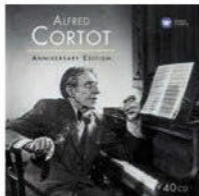
After her early and dazzling success, **Eileen Joyce** (whose agility was a source of wonder to Arrau, Gould and Fleisher, no less) ended her days in self-imposed exile from the concert platform, having retired at the peak of her powers. But if her recordings were for her 'old-fashioned', that is surely more a joy than a limitation. Her affection for the Berceuse is never in doubt, even when there are elements of a nervous instability that was to plague her during her tragically truncated career.

According to the pianist Abram Chasins, Alexander Brailowsky (on RCA – nla in its original format, but can be purchased on iTunes and as part of a Sony compilation)

achieved recognition through strenuousness, his audience willing him on to the bitter end. But the Berceuse isn't in the same vein as the ballades or scherzos, and so it is not a case of fighting against potentially overwhelming odds. Here, the *rubato* is fitful and ungainly – hardly a case of natural musical breathing. More recently, **Ivan Moravec**, a dark horse and, at his finest, a poet of the keyboard, is less than ideally controlled in the Berceuse, even though he offers playing of a different calibre compared to Brailowsky. There is much of that acute instinct for poetry and pianistic sheen he so admired in others (his eye and ear on pianists such as Michelangeli and Zimerman) but, again, his performance is marred by a nervous edge that creates too little sense

BEST HISTORICAL

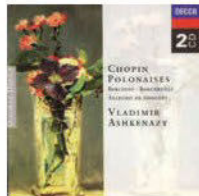
Alfred Cortot Warner Classics 704907-2 Of his five recordings, Cortot's earliest (1920) is the least sober, an ecstatically shifting kaleidoscope of moods and colours. His ground plan is always the same in this work,



yet the creed he imparted to his students – 'Improvise, lose yourself!' – allows his playing to take wing here, to fly above the printed page.

BEST LULLABY

Vladimir Ashkenazy Decca 452 167-2DF2 Measured, confidential and, in the final pages, magically lit, Ashkenazy's performance unites fidelity to the score with a deep romanticism. He once confessed to me that he had made



too many records. But his performance of the Berceuse – part and parcel of his complete Chopin cycle – surely tells us that he can never make enough.

BEST POETIC

Maurizio Pollini DG 431 623-2GH A patrician master of the keyboard, Pollini's gentleness, the absence of a *froidueur* sometimes associated with his playing, is memorable in the unflinching poise and lucidity



of this recording of the Berceuse. His performance is a shining example of poetry combined with a flawless pianistic sheen.

of timeless reverie. Like Tennyson's poor Lady of Shalott, 'the mirror cracks from side to side' and the spell is broken.

In a recent release of long-lost recordings, **Julius Katchen** returns us to a virtuoso Berceuse, garrulous and overheated – a reminder that this brilliant, ill-fated pianist (he died at the age of 42) was more adept at high-pitched drama than intimacy. Meanwhile, John Ogdon (IMP – nla, but can be purchased from select Amazon sellers), blessed and cursed with genius, was surely the biggest pianistic talent this country has ever produced, his playing entirely different from that of the great triumvirate Solomon, Curzon and Myra Hess. But his instability could surface, often when least expected, and this recording is impatient and overemphatic. Ogdon's delicacy was as remarkable as his thunder, but here the D flat bass-line nags against the treble tracery, and at that crucial bell-like C flat the pulse is slow rather than evenly maintained.

Before ending this section I should mention Fou Ts'ong (Sony – nla, but can be located on iTunes and Amazon), who astonished all who heard him in Warsaw's 1955 International Chopin Piano Competition with his special understanding of the mazurkas. But over the years his playing has become overdetailed, with a failure to realise that less is more. And so it is in the Berceuse, where every bar spills over with an air of significance. His habit of pulling back on the first beat of the bar before a sudden release becomes mannered. Put simply, there is too much going on.

FURTHER DISAPPOINTMENTS

More recently, there is, not unexpectedly, much to admire and be enthralled by in **Stephen Hough's** Berceuse, a valedictory close to his recital of Chopin's late masterpieces. Here, pianistic finesse is paramount, more so than on any of the previously discussed recordings. With playing that's rapid and simple, Hough gives us a different world from that of, say, Alfred Cortot, who for Daniel Barenboim 'discovered the opium in Chopin'. He presses on, disinclined to linger, and there is also a touch of diffidence – that is, until the final page, where there is a magically hushed sense of resolution. **Valerie Tryon**, too, avoids false or preening sentiment and histrionics, yet her performance, unlike Hough's, could be thought pedestrian. There is too little colour and variety, too little willingness to step outside a safe *mezzo-piano/mezzo-forte* boundary.

The very disc itself would cry out if I were not to include **Nadia Reisenberg**,



Vladimir Ashkenazy's 'dreamlike' recording of the Berceuse for Decca 'recreates a true lullaby'

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1916 Moiseiwitsch	Naxos ⑧ 8 11117
1920 Cortot	Warner Classics ⑤ (40 discs) 704907-2
1928 Friedman	Naxos ⑧ 8 110686
1932 Rubinstein	EMI ⑤ ⑤ 455334-2
1937 Hofmann	VAI ② ② VAIA1036
1939 Joyce	APR ⑤ ⑤ APR7502 (12/11)
1942 Solomon	Testament ② SBT1030
1943 Michelangeli	Naxos ⑧ 8 112052
1945 Kempff	Music & Arts ② ② CD1071 (3/01)
1955/57 Reisenberg	Bridge ② ② BRIDGE9276
1958 Kempff	Decca ② ② 479 0314
1962/64 Katchen	Audite ② ② AUDITE21 419 (7/14)
1968 Askenase	DG ② ② 477 5242GOM7 (4/05)
1973 Barenboim	EMI ② ② 585453-2 (5/74)
1974-84 Ashkenazy	Decca ② ② 452 167-2DF2 (7/78) ⁹⁰
1985 Perahia	Sony ⑤ ⑤ 88843 06243-2 (3/11 ⁹⁰)
1989 Stott	Sony ⑤ ⑤ 88875 13562-2 (9/89 ⁹⁰)
1990 Pollini	DG ② ② 431 623-2GH (3/92)
1998 Kissin	RCA ② ② 09026 63259-2 (6/99)
1998 Pires	DG ② ② 457 585-2GH (1/99)
2000 Feltsman	Nimbus ② ② NI6126 (A/10)
2002 Moravec	Vox ② ② VXP7908 (3/04)
2006 Tryon	APR ③ ③ APR7301 (1/08)
2008 Hamelin	Hyperion ② CDA67706 (2/09)
2008 Ohlsson	Hyperion ⑤ ⑤ CDS44351/66 (2/09)
2009 Hough	Hyperion ② CDA67764 (5/10)

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Murray Perahia's 1985 recording conveys an ear 'for texture, rhythm and harmony' which 'colours every bar of a performance of exceptional refinement'

who, after a matter-of-fact start, is exalted and fleet before sinking into graceful repose. Per contra, **Kathryn Stott** sets a slow and measured tempo before confiding the Berceuse's inner secrets with a special ardour and lack of constraint – nothing is taken for granted. **Vladimir Feltsman**, who, like Hough, ends his recital with the Berceuse, giving it pride of place, is the opposite of the glossy overseasoned pianist, though, like **Daniel Barenboim**, his sound is less consistently veiled with shafts of light compared to the finest performances.

JOY AT LAST

Among the finest is **Solomon** with his slow (some say lugubrious) tempo, minute inflections and unflinching control. Nor would I want to be without **Evgeny Kissin's** way of casting an impressionistic haze to create a Berceuse that makes Debussy's love of Chopin understandable.

Garrick Ohlsson, too, in his generously inflected reading, eases from one variation to another with romantic freedom, though he is less audacious than **Maria João Pires**, whose provocative and searching performance has a special sense of occasion. Also in this section is **Mark-André Hamelin**,

his phenomenal technique subdued to allow for a rare lucidity.

And so to the final four. **Alfred Cortot** made several recordings of the Berceuse between 1920 and 1954. Of these, my favourite is the first, although to some extent you can catch in all his performances his heady allure, caprice and capacity to send Chopin's *fioriture* soaring skywards without forgetting its underlying poetic impulse. No more starry-eyed Berceuse exists on record. It seems right, too, that I should follow this with **Murray Perahia**, who once said that although his playing belonged to a different generation he liked to think he retained something of the spirit of Cortot. A prince of pianists, Perahia's ear for texture, rhythm and harmony colours every bar of a performance of exceptional refinement. **Vladimir Ashkenazy** also recreates a true lullaby, a genuine berceuse, with the piquant grace notes at bars 15-18 returning as an enlivening memory in his final and dreamlike fade-out. **Maurizio Pollini**, who, like his great compatriot Michelangeli, allowed his focus over the years to narrow to the point of severity, is at his greatest in the Berceuse. For the French pianist Bernard d'Ascoli,

Pollini was a 'moral' pianist whose mastery scorns excess or indulgence. After Pollini's triumph in Warsaw's 1960 Chopin competition, Rubinstein declared that technically his playing was better than that of any of the jury. On the basis of this recording, he might have added that his technique is complemented by a truly aristocratic poise and poetry.

Yet if coerced, I would give the crown to Murray Perahia. His Berceuse is of a supreme clarity, tonal elegance and musical perspective. It is that ultimate illusion, the perfect and definitive performance. **G**

TOP CHOICE

Murray Perahia Sony 88843 06243-2

If there is such a thing as a definitive performance, this is it. While scrupulously modern, Perahia recalls the spirit of the great pianists of the past – Schnabel, (Edwin) Fischer and, above all, Cortot. But if Cortot's wrong



notes were 'the wrong notes of a god' (Yvonne Lefébure), then Perahia's right notes are surely the *right* notes of a god. As close to perfection as you can get.

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PLAYLISTS

Explore music via our themed listening suggestions – this month with a choral focus

Music for Lent

Alexandra Coghlan chooses 10 works that explore the meaning of Lent

For a time of abstinence, Lent has a surprisingly rich musical life. Solo organ music might be discouraged in church, Alleluias silenced and Glorias omitted, but the season also has a rich seam of penitential works taking us from Ash Wednesday through to the spiritual climax of Holy Week.

No text is more synonymous with Lent than Psalm 51 – the *Miserere*. Allegri's ubiquitous setting provides a structural model followed by James MacMillan's reimagining, alternating chanted sections with elaborate polyphony. Josquin's 24-part canon *Qui habitat* treats its more optimistic psalm text with extraordinary richness.

The image of the Virgin Mary contemplating the crucified Christ is a potent one, and settings of the *Stabat mater* are legion. Few, however, capture the tender delicacy of a mother's love quite like Domenico Scarlatti's. Another musical meditation on this same scene comes in the form of Buxtehude's *Membra Jesu nostri*, while Cavalli's *Ave regina caelorum* contemplates the Virgin with madrigalian vividness.

Lassus, Byrd and Leighton provide three contrasting Lenten motets: Byrd's *Civitas sancti tui*, with its textual echoes of the Lamentations, grieves with polyphonic intensity, while Lassus's *Media vita* contemplates death with exquisite acceptance. Leighton's larger *Crucifixus* reaches its climax in the sudden angular simplicity of his 'Hymn'.

Lenten music is not limited to church, as concert works by Łukaszewski and Caplet prove, each taking inspiration from the story of Christ's Passion and Resurrection.

- **D Scarlatti** *Stabat mater*
Monteverdi Choir / Gardiner
Warner Classics
- **MacMillan** *Miserere*
The Sixteen / Christophers
Coro
- **Buxtehude** *Membra Jesu nostri*
Cantus Cölln / Junghänel
Harmonia Mundi



James MacMillan reimagines Allegri's *Miserere*

- **Caplet** *Le miroir de Jésus*
Orchestre des Pays de Savoie / Foster
Radio France
- **Lassus** *Media vita*
Gabrieli Consort / McCreesh
Archiv
- **Josquin** *Qui habitat*
Huelgas Ensemble / Van Nevel
Sony
- **Cavalli** *Ave regina caelorum*
Akadèmia / Lasserre
Pierre Verany
- **Byrd** *Civitas sancti tui*
Contrapunctus / Rees
Signum
- **Łukaszewski** *Lenten Music*
Baltic Neopolis Orchestra / Tomaszewski
Dux
- **Leighton** *Crucifixus*
St John's College Choir / Robinson
Naxos

Wood & the Wesleys

Andrew Mellor chooses 10 pieces by three celebrated sacred composers

This year marks 150 years since the birth of Charles Wood and 250 since that of Samuel Sebastian Wesley, father to Samuel, who was born in 1810. A century separated the elder two, as well as nationality (Wood was born in Armagh, now Northern Ireland; Wesley hailed from Bristol in England) and the hue of their Christianity (Wood a protestant; Wesley senior from a famously Methodist family but an early convert to Catholicism).

But the older men undoubtedly shared a distinct ability to set sacred texts with clarity and profundity, a skill Wesley junior inherited too. His anthems, grander in scale than his father's, often updated the 'verse-anthem' tradition of previous decades in their alternation of declamatory solo episodes with grand choruses. Wood's music is purposefully less demonstrative and more distilled in texture, method and feeling – structurally tight, thematically thrifty and delicate in its part writing. His *Nunc dimittis* makes a fascinating counterweight to the thickly scored setting by Holst, but the true miracle of Wood's craft is the sense of purity he brings to a short, simple piece like *Oculi omnium*.

- **Wood** *God omnipotent reigneth*
King's College Choir / Cleobury
King's College Cambridge
- **Wood** *Hail, gladdening light*
Trinity College Choir / Marlow
Sony Classical
- **Wood** *Nunc dimittis*
Jesus College Choir / Williams
Signum Classics
- **Wood** *Oculi omnium*
Rastatter Hofkapelle / Ochs
Carus
- **Wesley** *In exitu Israel*
Gonville & Caius College Choir / Webber
ASV
- **Wesley** *Wash me thoroughly*
Clare College Chapel Choir / Brown
Guild
- **Wesley** *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace*
Choir of St Paul's Cathedral / Rose
Guild
- **Wesley** *O God, whose nature and property*
Choir of York Minster / Moore
Guild
- **Wesley** *Voluntary in D*
Jennifer Bate
Somm
- **Wesley** *O sing unto me roundelaie*
Canzonetta / Wynn Davies
Somm



The playlists for this feature were compiled in conjunction with

Qobuz, the music streaming service. You can listen to the playlists at gramophone.co.uk/playlists

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live performances as well as concerts and operas available to watch online, including Peter Sellars's riveting take on Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and Cav & Pag from the Met

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & UK cinemas

Verdi's *La traviata*, February 4

With its 19th-century Paris setting and sumptuous costumes and sets, Richard Eyre's popular production of Verdi's classic is a great one for the cinema screen, Yves Abel (Chief Conductor of the Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie) conducts a cast headed up by Venera Gimadieva as Violetta and Saimir Pirgu as Alfredo.

roh.org.uk/cinemas

UK Cinemas

Jonas Kaufmann: *An Evening with Puccini*, opens February 11

Although now being released later than planned, this brand-new film of Kaufmann singing Puccini arias is intended as a complement to his latest release on Sony Classical, 'Nessun Dorma - The Puccini Album' (A/15). Directed by Brian Large and produced by Arts Alliance, it features the tenor's summer 2015 Puccini recital at La Scala, Milan, with the Filarmonica della Scala conducted by Jochen Rieder, which prompted five encores and 40 minutes of applause. There's also some rare archive footage of Puccini himself.

jonaskaufmannpuccinifilm.com

Bridgewater Hall, Manchester & BBC Radio 3 Sir Mark Elder conducts the Hallé, February 11, recorded for broadcast February 15

'Fate' is the theme of this concert, with Rachmaninov's *Isle of the Dead* opening the evening followed by baritone Roderick Williams singing Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*. Then, the second half of the concert occupies an entirely different emotional plane with Shostakovich's Symphony No 15. Those able to attend the concert in person also have the option of attending a Fate-themed pre-concert talk given by Hallé horn player, amateur and BBC Radio 3 broadcaster, Tom Redmond, with musical illustrations provided by pupils from Chetham's School of Music.

halle.co.uk; bbc.co.uk/radio3

BBC Radio 3

Semyon Bychkov conducts Eugene Onegin, February 13

This is the delayed broadcast of the Royal Opera House's revival (in December and January) of Kasper Holten's 2013 production of Tchaikovsky's classic opera, and its conductor and cast make it one to savour. *Onegin* was the first opera Bychkov

WATCH ONLINE

Digital Concert Hall - Peter Sellars's and Simon Rattle's *Pelléas et Mélisande*



Debussy

Sir Simon Rattle and Peter Sellars have collaborated before in Berlin's Philharmonie: on the two Bach Passions, performances of extraordinary power, insight, humanity, conviction and strength. Now they turn to Debussy's only completed opera, though, as Sellars argues in an absorbing interview with the BPO's Sarah Willis, it's a very un-opera-like opera. He talks about working in the Philharmonie with its extraordinary intimacy and clarity of sound – and his experience of, and feeling for, the space bears glorious fruit in this *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

The singers perform from within the orchestra, on or around a couple of small raised stages at the conductor's elbow and at the back, as well as on an apron stage at the front. Everything is lit minimally, with coloured fluorescent tubes, by Ben Zamora.

Sellars talks about the work's 'cosmology of longing', and his direction of his superb cast – Christian Gerhaher and Magdalena Kožená in the title-roles, with Gerald Finley as Golaud, Bernarda Fink as Geneviève and Franz-Josef Selig as Arkel – beautifully taps into this often heart-rending emotional undertow. The filming, at times pretty close up, really lets you see the singers' faces – and luckily all are very good actors, totally inside their roles, and they never relax for a second. Vocally they're very fine, too: for me, Finley's Golaud is a shattering creation. Rattle draws playing of shimmering beauty one minute, and colossal, subterranean power the next from his great orchestra. I found it utterly spell-binding. **James Jolly**

Available via various subscription packages, from seven days (€9.90) to 12 months (€149), at digitalconcerthall.com

conducted, when he was just 20 years old in a 1972 concert performance in St Petersburg. Since then, he has conducted it in Paris and Florence, and in 1992 while Music Director of the Orchestre de Paris he made a landmark recording of it for Philips. That recording starred Dmitri Hvorostovsky as Onegin, and the baritone reprises that role with Bychkov for the Covent Garden production. Equally Holten's production features the Prince Gremin of Feruccio Furlanetto, who sang the

role in Bychkov's Florence production. The cast also features Nicole Car as Tatyana, Michael Fabiano as Lensky, Oksana Volkova as Olga, plus Diana Montague and Catherine Wyn-Rogers.

roh.org.uk/productions/eugene-onegin-by-kasper-holten; bbc.co.uk/radio3

Village Underground & online

Salon ensemble performance of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, February 17

WATCH ONLINE

GSOPlay - Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto played by the youthful Kit Armstrong, under Kent Nagano



Beethoven

The Brendel pupil Kit Armstrong has already revealed his questing musical mind on disc in a programme of Bach contextualised with Ligeti and his own

music (Sony Classical, 1/14), and has recently released a Liszt disc (see page 60). Cutting through the middle of these two keyboard giants, this concert presents him in one of the warhorses of the concerto repertoire, Beethoven's C minor.

Armstrong isn't one of those Klavier-tigers, though, blustering his way through with greater regard for outsize personality than for sensitivity to line and structure. On the contrary, he evidently enjoys the sound this well-voiced Steinway can make when held back a notch or two, clearly acknowledging Beethoven's roots in the 18th century as well as his influence on the 19th.

There are a couple of finger slips but not that you'd really notice without the score in front of you. The Gothenburg orchestra isn't the most refined but Kent Nagano is an observant conductor, honouring the score and working well in tandem with his young soloist. And it's Armstrong's charisma that makes this performance: with a minimum of camera-aware emoting and little in the way of Lang Lang-like facial expressions, he leaves his Rolls-Royce technique to do the talking. **David Threasher** Recorded on November 5, 2015 and available, free to view, at gsoplay.se. You can also download the GSOPlay App and, for a fee of 99kr, watch and listen to the GSO concerts offline.

Another instalment in the City of London Sinfonia's 2016 RE:Imagine season, 'CLoSer: Song of the Earth' sees CLS joined by two rising young UK vocal stars Anne Huntley and Gwilym Bowen, in a rare chance to hear Mahler's valedictory song-cycle in its arrangement for salon ensemble, in one of London's most atmospheric spaces. Readings from Mahler's letters will open the evening, along with Schoenberg's arrangement of Johann Strauss's *Rosen Aus Dem Süden*. The concert will also include a newly-commissioned arrangement of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV565, by the young Australian-British composer Luke Styles, as part of CLS's 'Bach RE:Imagined' series. The event will be streamed live, and there will be a highlights package to view for seven days after the concert.

cls.co.uk

St Michael's, Ancoats & online

Psappha perform Stockhausen and Ligeti, February 18

Manchester-based new-music ensemble Psappha have now made St Michael's, Ancoats - the Hall's home - their new musical base, and they're streaming all their concerts online. Their first Stockhausen and Ligeti programme from St Michael's includes Stockhausen's classic *Kontakte*, performed here in its second arrangement for electronic sounds, piano and percussion. The concert also includes Ligeti's Horn Trio, Jennifer Higdon's *Zaka*, and the premiere of a new work by a young composer from the University of Manchester. If you can't get to the concert, the highlights will be available afterwards on the website, through YouTube and Vimeo.

psappha.com/watch-and-listen

National Concert Hall, Dublin & RTÉ lyric fm

Nathalie Stutzmann conducts Wagner and Mahler, February 26

With her parallel careers as contralto and conductor, Nathalie Stutzmann is one of the most interesting musical personalities around at the moment, and her conducting career is going from strength to strength. In addition to being Artist-in-Residence for the 2015/16 season with the RLPO and Associate Artist with the Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, she has also recently been announced as Associate Artist with the São Paulo SO. This programme with the RTÉ National SO features Wagner's *Tannhäuser* Overture, and the Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan and Isolde*. Mezzo Tarra Erraught and baritone Stéphane Degout are the soloists in Mahler's *Songs from Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.

rte.ie/lyricfm

WATCH ONLINE

MetOpera on Demand - David McVicar's Cav & Pag is definitely a game of two halves

Leoncavallo • Mascagni

It was certainly interesting to revisit David McVicar's Metropolitan Opera staging of the opera's terrible twins *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* so soon after Damiano Michieletto's new production for the Royal Opera. McVicar places the action in the same location, but 50 years apart, not that there's anything remotely Sicilian in the grim setting.

Cav is a dour affair, a stage encircled by a chorus playing musical chairs. Eva-Maria Westbroek carries the opera dramatically, although her soprano is in blowsy form, a ragged vibrato flapping at top notes (she was in stronger voice in London). Marcelo Álvarez is a loud, but Italianate Turiddu. 'McVicarisms'



abound, not least a giant revolve serving no purpose, and odd backing dancers for Alfio's entrance aria.

Pagliacci works much better; McVicar plays up the vaudeville aspects and the pantomime is genuinely funny. Patricia Racette is a game Nedda, hoofing along as Columbina, and Álvarez is a terrifying

Canio, hitting the bottle in 'Vesti la giubba'. George Gagnidze is a bullish Alfio but a more sympathetic Tonio than usual.

Fabio Luisi's conducting lacks Antonio Pappano's

muscularity and fire, really limping in the Santuzza-Alfio duet, but the *Cav* Intermezzo, in which the stage is filled with candle-carrying chorus, works well.

Mark Pullinger

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A famous name revived – and more

Amplifiers take centre stage this month, from the compact to the massive



The new Marantz HD-AMP1 integrated amplifier **1**, first previewed back in June last year and now going into the shops at £799, promises much. Not only is it a development of the HD-DAC1, the company's digital-to-analogue converter/headphone amplifier reviewed in these pages almost a year ago, it also revives the company's MusicLink line of the early 1990s, combining high performance with compact dimensions.

Just a little larger than the headphone amp, the new model uses a high-quality digital-to-analogue converter to handle files at up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD64/128/256, and has an in-house-designed digital filtering system called Marantz Musical Digital Filtering, plus the company's Hyper-Dynamic Amplifier Modules for enhanced sound quality.

Inputs include optical and coaxial digital, plus USB-A and -B connections, and there are also two sets of analogue inputs. Supplied with a remote control handset, the HD-AMP1 is available in black or 'silvergold', with wood-effect side-cheeks.

On a somewhat grander scale is the C1100 pre-amplifier from McIntosh Laboratory **2**. Selling for £12,995 via UK distributor Jordan Acoustics, this two-box design is said to offer 'huge connectivity and McIntosh's best technical performance to date'. It comprises the tube-powered pre-amplifier itself, powered by 12 valves

(six 12AX7A and six 12AT7) plus a separate controller, the two being linked using a pair of shielded umbilical cables.

Both units are of a dual-mono design, with left and right channels isolated from each other both electrically and mechanically, and the C1100 can be controlled from the front panel or the remote control supplied. Inputs extend to six balanced and four unbalanced connections, plus adjustable-loading moving magnet and moving coil phono inputs, with outputs on two sets each of balanced and unbalanced connections. There's also a high-output headphone section with McIntosh's Headphone Crossfeed Director technology, and a Home Theater Passthrough to allow the C1100 to be integrated into surround systems.

The McIntosh is handbuilt in Binghamton, New York; from Plymouth, Minnesota, comes the Audio Research GSi75 **3**, described as 'a pre-amplifier, amplifier, phono stage, and digital-to-analogue converter all in one chassis' – or in other words an integrated amplifier with digital inputs. Selling for £14,500 via UK distributor Absolute Sounds, it's a valve-based design, with new KT150 valves delivering 75W per channel, and a digital stage able to handle files at up to 192kHz/24-bit, as well as DSD. A high-quality headphone stage is also built in.

Back to small amplifiers, and there's a new version of the little Pro-ject MaiA,

in the form of the MaiA DS **4**. While sharing the compact footprint of the original, it stands twice as tall, allowing the use of even higher-quality components. Available now in black or silver via UK distributor Henley Audio at £699, the MaiA DS has four analogue inputs including a switchable MM/MC phono stage, three digital inputs, and USB and Bluetooth connectivity with aptX support.

It has a built-in headphone amplifier, while the digital section can handle content at up to 24-bit/192kHz and DSD256. It's also compatible with Pro-ject's free Box Control app for Android, allowing all its functions, and those of connected Pro-ject Box Design products, to be controlled from a tablet or smartphone. An iOS version is on the way for Apple users.

Finally this month there's a new personal audio player from Astell & Kern. The £1499 AK320 **5** is designed to offer many of the features of the flagship AK380 at a more affordable price. Made from a single block of aluminium, the player uses a 24-bit/192kHz dual-DAC design to handle formats up to DSD, and has 128GB of internal memory plus a microSD slot for expansion to 256GB+. Built-in wireless connectivity allows streaming and direct downloads to the device, and there's also integrated Bluetooth to connect to suitable speakers and headphones. In addition, the AK320 can be used as an external DAC to connect computers to an audio system. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Audiolab 8300CD/8300A

The latest pairing from a long-established brand makes a potent and stylish combination



AUDIOLAB 8300CD

Type CD player/DAC/digital pre-amp

Price £1000

Formats played CD, CD-R (CD section), files up to 192kHz (optical/coax/AES/EBU inputs), files up to 384kHz plus DSD64/128/256 (via USB)

Digital inputs Two coaxial, optical, AES/EBU, USB (Type B)

Digital outputs Coaxial, optical, AES/EBU

Analogue outputs RCA phonos, XLRs

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Finishes (both models) Black, silver

Dimensions (WxHxD) 44.4x8x31.7cm

AUDIOLAB 8300A

Type Stereo integrated amplifier

Price £900

Output 75Wpc (into 8 ohms), 115Wpc (4 ohms)

Inputs Phono (mm/mc), five line on RCA phonos, one on balanced XLRs; power amp input

Outputs Two sets of speaker terminals (for biwiring); two sets of pre-amp-level on RCA phonos

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 44.4x8x33cm

audiolab.co.uk

a few pence short of £1000, as does the power amp, while the 8300A amplifier is £100 less.

As is often the way these days, describing the 8300CD as a CD player rather sells it short. It's also designed to function as a digital-to-analogue converter for other digital sources, and as a pre-amplifier able to be connected directly to power amplification.

It has two optical inputs, two coaxial and a balanced XLR AES/EBU input, plus a USB connection for use with computers. As well as playing CDs via its slot-loading mechanism, it can handle files at up to 96kHz/24-bit over the optical connections, 192kHz/24-bit via the electrical ones, and up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD64/128/256 using the USB connection. In replacing the two CD players in the last Audiolab generation – the 8200CD and 8200CDQ – the new player also has analogue output at both fixed and variable level, and on conventional RCA phono sockets and balanced XLRs, and source selection and output volume can be selected either on the front panel or via the remote handset supplied.

Audiolab explains that the slot-loading mechanism here was chosen for reliability after extensive comparisons with the more usual drawer designs, and that the heart of this new player is the same digital processor used in the 8200CD/CDQ. This is the 32-bit ESS Sabre hybrid multibit Delta-Sigma DAC, here in its 9018 variant: it uses 256 DAC elements per channel and runs at 84.672MHz, with all incoming digital datastreams being upsampled to this frequency before conversion in order to reduce distortion and noise levels.

A decade or so back, after a period as part of the ill-fated TAG McLaren Audio project, British company Audiolab found a home as part of IAG, which also takes in Mission, Quad, Wharfedale and Castle Acoustics, the products now being made in that company's huge manufacturing plant in China. The first 'new Audiolab' products emerged in 2005: despite similarities to both the originals and the TMA derivatives, they were actually new designs.

Since then, the brand has branched out into new product areas, launching its compact LAB Series products, best known for the M-DAC digital-to-analogue converter but also encompassing a 'half-width' CD transport and power amplifier.

Yet the classic 8000 series has lived on. Audiolab has recently launched its 'third generation' range, in the form of the 8300CD player and 8300A amplifier we have here, plus the 8300MB monobloc power amplifier. The CD player sells for

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The player also has a range of digital filters available for user-selection: there are seven available for CD and PCM, and a further four dedicated to use with DSD content, the latter allowing progressively more ultrasonic content through to the amplifier and speakers. As is so often the case with these filters, it's hard to give specific recommendations as to which is 'best': the results vary widely with recorded content and partnering equipment, so the best advice to the user is to experiment and get a feel for which setting suits personal preferences.

Putting the DAC in the CD player has enabled Audiolab to keep the 8300A amplifier relatively simple, very much in the tradition of past amps from the company. It's an all-analogue design, as 8000-series amps always have been, but for this generation the company has completely re-designed both the circuit layout and the operation of the product.

Five line inputs are provided, plus one set on balanced XLRs and a switchable moving coil/moving magnet phono stage, these being selected by the control to the far left of the front panel, while volume is to the right. New for this generation is the OLED display in the centre of the fascia, while the 'mode' control beside it offers Audiolab's traditional flexibility of operation: the 8300A can be switched to work as an integrated amplifier, a pre-amp, a power amp or as a pre/power amp with the two sections split – enabling, for example, its integration with a surround processor or amplifier. The amplifier is of a dual-mono design, and delivers 75W per channel under the control of Audiolab's Active Current Delivery system, which is designed to guarantee no distortion, even with the amp running at full power.

PERFORMANCE

All-new they may be, but the 8300A/8300CD pair retain the sleek looks of past models from the brand. Available in black or silver, each component stands just 8cm tall, and is built and finished to a very high standard, with thick aluminium panels and precise controls adding to the quality feel.

Past Audiolab products – and in particular the amplifiers – had a reputation in some quarters for being either clinical or even a bit abrasive-sounding. I have to say it's not an opinion to which I subscribed, although as a reviewing system the old Audiolabs I used were better as an analytical tool than a relaxing listen. But these new 8300 series products manage to combine insight and detail with warmth and finesse, making them a highly attractive all-round listen.

The amplifier is perhaps the easiest to cover first, as it really does very little beyond 'what it says on the tin', which is very much a good thing. What goes in at the front end comes out from the speaker terminals without any messing about, meaning this amplifier gives a very clear view of what the source components are doing, for good or bad. Even the phono stage is rather fine, as a brief spin of a few LPs proved, and the amp has plenty of power and control, with no sense of that ACD system holding things back – rather the 8300A just seems to be able to deliver power way beyond its rated 75Wpc. That makes it the perfect partner for the excellent 8300CD, which proves to be not just a very good CD player but also a fine DAC for higher-resolution content fed in via a computer, really making the most of the immediacy and detail available on hi-res recordings.

OK, so it doesn't quite have the warmest or richest bass in the business, and the same is true of the partnering amplifier, but what it lacks in lushness it more than makes up for with the speed and definition down in the lower registers, whether it's handling the left-hand octaves of solo piano or the scale of the chaps who sit to the rear of the strings with the very big fiddles. It's an exciting, vibrant sound, packed with detail, and that, allied to the ability of the Audiolab duo to deliver realistic dynamics (and plenty of level when required), makes for a sound that's never dull, and puts all the money up there and out through the speakers.

True to Audiolab's founding values of high-quality build and a lot of performance for the money, it's hard not to imagine these latest 8300 series components doing very well indeed. **G**

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Marantz SA8005

For example, the Marantz SA8005 and PM8005 are pitched a bit below them, and offer an excellent combination of high-quality finish, excellent performance for the money and good facilities, including SACD playback and computer connectivity. More details at marantz.co.uk



Arcam CDS27

The Arcam CDS27 player takes a different approach to computer connectivity, having both SACD playback and built-in network streaming, rather than the direct USB connection of the Marantz and Audiolab. Its perfect partner is the no-nonsense A29 amplifier, an all-analogue design built for optimum resolution. Details at arcam.co.uk



Naim CD5si and Nait5si

Finally, if you want to play it really simple, the Naim CD5si and Nait5si are the way to go. The CD5si is 'just' a CD player, but an extremely good one, while the Nait5si is the latest version of Naim's famous entry-level amplifier, and the ideal match for the player. See naimaudio.com for more.

● REVIEW BOWERS & WILKINS P5 WIRELESS

Cordless headphones offer convenience on the move and no-compromise performance

Bowers & Wilkins has, in recent years, done a rather good job of reinventing itself as not just a loudspeaker company but a manufacturer of a wide range of hi-fi products. Yes, its core business is still speakers, and in the past couple of years it has completely refreshed its entry-level 600 Series, the midrange CM models and most recently the flagship 800 Series, but it's also been busy expanding the personal and portable audio line-up it kicked off with the 2007 launch of the Zeppelin speaker for Apple's iPod and the then-recently-announced iPhone.

Zeppelin has gone through various iterations since then, but it was followed in 2010 by Bowers & Wilkins's next logical step: the introduction of its first headphone model, the P5. Finished in high-quality leather, the P5 was unashamedly luxurious, and again aimed at Apple owners as a means of hearing better sound on the move.

Now we have a model taking that concept further, with the arrival of the P5 Wireless, which is – somewhat logically – a version of the P5 with built-in aptX Bluetooth connectivity, allowing it to be used with your phone in your pocket or tablet in your bag, without the need for a trailing wire from player to headphones.

The company's move into headphones was perfectly understandable, as just about every loudspeaker company seems to have joined the headlong rush into making these personal audio devices, encouraged by industry analysis showing this to be one of the very few sectors of the audio market – if not the only – to show any significant growth of late. Given the recent arrival of ever-increasing numbers of wireless headphone systems, the launch of the P5 Wireless seems similarly sensible. Not that the new Bowers & Wilkins model should be confused with the budget designs you can find on websites named after Indian dishes or South American rivers, and which seem to start from not much more than £20: the P5 Wireless sells for an altogether more substantial £330, give or take a penny, but then it is based on a pair of headphones now costing £250 in its latest P5 Series 2 version.

So in effect you're paying an extra £80 for the wireless connectivity, although this does also get you two built-in microphones to allow you to converse



BOWERS & WILKINS P5 WIRELESS

Type Bluetooth wireless headphones

Price £330

Inputs Bluetooth aptX/AAC/SBC, 3.5mm stereo mini-jack, micro USB for charging/service/firmware updates, two built-in microphones

Drive units 2x4cm full-range

Impedance/Sensitivity In passive mode 22 ohms/109dB/V at 1kHz

Accessories supplied Charging cable, audio cable, carrying pouch

bowers-wilkins.com

on a connected smartphone, along with multifunctional buttons to play/pause/skip tracks and answer or reject calls all with not much more than a deft flick of your right ear.

If I spent a lot more time travelling, the B&W P5 would definitely be on my headphone wish-list

The headphones, of course, also have built-in amplification for their Bluetooth function, along with volume controls, and are said to run for up to 17 hours on one charge of their internal battery, which is achieved via a micro USB socket on the left earpiece and a cable supplied. A three-colour LED shows the state of charge, both while in use and when the battery is being replenished: it changes from green to red to yellow as the battery runs down, and blinks green as recharging happens before turning solid green when fully charged. I have to admit I didn't subject the headphones to a 'full charge to flat' cycle, as the time to discharge will of course depend on factors such as volume level, but after a few weeks of use I have no reason to doubt the claimed battery cycle: I wasn't aware of constant worry about the battery

dying, and anyway a full charge from flat only takes around three hours.

It's also worth noting that the P5 wireless has another trick up its sleeve, or at least behind its left earpad. Remove the pad, which is held on magnetically, and you reveal a socket into which the supplied headphone cable can be connected. Replace the earpad, and you now have a pair of passive P5 headphones ready for use with your hi-fi system, or indeed any other device without Bluetooth connectivity.

PERFORMANCE

I'm quite a fan of the Bowers & Wilkins headphone range, having tried all the models and used a pair of P3s from time to time for listening on the move. The P5 Wireless offers the same very high standard of performance as the standard P5 model, and by far the best sound I've heard from a pair of Bluetooth headphones.

It's also just as comfortable as any of the company's models, at 213g weighing just 18g more than the standard P5 headphones, already one of the lightest and easiest-to-wear models around. In use in Bluetooth mode one welcomes the lack of drag from the cable connecting player to headphones, while it only takes a moment or two to convert it to 'domestic' mode if required.

In fact, the only drawback with the wireless model is that it does sound a little more congested than the standard one when used without a cable – but then that's a limitation of Bluetooth rather than the headphones, as is clear when listening to the same content via a wired connection. It's not a huge difference – it's just a matter of the treble being slightly less open and crisp, and the bass marginally softer – and in all probability will be obscured by any external noise when the headphones are used on the move.

It's also worth noting that the Bluetooth operation is limited in that it can't play high-resolution music, which is no problem when using portable devices but may be more annoying if you have a lot of hi-res files on a computer, for example. The only answer for that is to consider a hi-res/DSD-capable USB DAC/headphone amplifier, along with a pair of conventional headphones.

The P5 Wireless is a high-quality, very fine-sounding design with both style and flexibility. If I spent a lot more time travelling, it would definitely be on my headphone wish-list. **G**

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● ESSAY

Is the audio market changing? Or just diversifying?

Too many commentators say the way we listen has been altered forever but the truth is that we just have more choice of how and when we enjoy music

Now we're well into a new year, perhaps the hubbub of retrospection, introspection and haruspicy will die down a bit. Recent months have seen commentators looking back at how the audio industry is on its last legs, asking 'What can be done to save this hobby of ours and why don't youngsters get it?', and predicting a future in which CDs, downloads and all will finally be swept away.

The sum-up? To quote the great John Laurie's character in *Dad's Army* (now reappearing refreshed on the big screen played by Bill Paterson), 'We're all doomed!'. Apparently what are referred to as 'kids today' are no longer interested in music, don't listen to it and even if they do don't really care what's used to play it. Give them a free pirate mp3 file of the latest overhyped pop track, bung it on their phone, let them play it through tinny ear-buds and they're good, thanks.

Meanwhile hi-fi is all about middle-aged (or older) white-haired (if haired at all) men obsessing over anachronistic equipment at hi-fi shows held in hotels where, even if the equipment ever sounded any good, it's undersold by cynical, uninterested sales people in stripped-out bedrooms, giving it no chance to show what it can do. No wonder it's dying off almost as fast as those 'audiophiles': all those examining the entrails of audio – in the form of those overpriced 'snake oil' cables and the like – can see is the end of the industry as we know it.

Even the so-called vinyl revival is, apparently, illusory. The theory is that the majority of those shiny new record players and substantially priced LP re-releases of classic recordings are being bought by the ubiquitous 'hipsters', who never actually play the music but rather collect it as domestic set-dressing, much as they might purchase antique cameras or esoteric coffee-making paraphernalia.

Or so we're told. Trouble is, down here at the hi-fi coalface, it doesn't quite seem like that, and things are rather less binary than the absolutist commentators may



Adele proved that there's still a market for buying music

have us think. Yes, there has been a rise in the popularity of streaming services but, as recent coverage has shown, it's not been so significant a seachange as to prove profitable for streaming operators or those whose music they supply online.

In simple terms, we're consuming music however we want to, rather than how we're being told to

And is there still a taste for buying music? One needs only ask the British singer Adele, who decided to withhold her latest work from Spotify when it was released back in November and saw it become the fastest-selling British album of all time, with 800,000 copies bought in the UK in the first week of availability, of which over 250,000 were downloads – or to put it another way, of which over half a million were physical copies – before clocking up a million sales within 10 days of release. In the States, it sold a staggering 3.38m copies in its first week, followed by another million or so in its second week,

giving it a two-week sales figure in the US of just under 4.5m.

All of which follows the singer's previous two releases, which sold 4m in 2012 and 5.82m in 2011. Although she may have received a critical mauling, and is probably way off the radar of most readers of this magazine, there's no denying that she does prove the public still has an appetite for buying recorded music.

Oh, and while the first-week US sales of the album on LP were dwarfed by CD and download sales – 22,000 copies against 1.71m CDs and 1.64m downloads (incidentally meaning 49 per cent of all album downloads that week were of this one title) – that still means a significant number of people buying, and presumably playing, this set on LP. After all, popular Adele may be, but she's hardly typical hipster fare!

So what's actually going on?

Well, in simple terms, we're consuming music however we want to, rather than how we're being told to, and modern audio equipment is being designed to cater for however we want to do so. Amplifiers are being designed with phono sections again, enabling turntables to be connected to them, or with digital-to-analogue conversion built in to allow them to be fed by a home computer.

Network music players have both the ability to play ultra-high-resolution DSD files, whether sourced from old analogue recordings or brand-new releases, and to stream online music services in anything from MP3 to CD quality and beyond. Pocket music players have gone beyond the limitations of iOS and can now play just about any music format you want – well, except LP!

Is any of this a sign of a slackening of interest in the way we buy and enjoy music? I think not: in fact more effort than ever is going into making more of our favourite recordings, however we obtain them – and increasing to a previously unparalleled level the opportunities for us all to discover and audition new music and performances. **G**



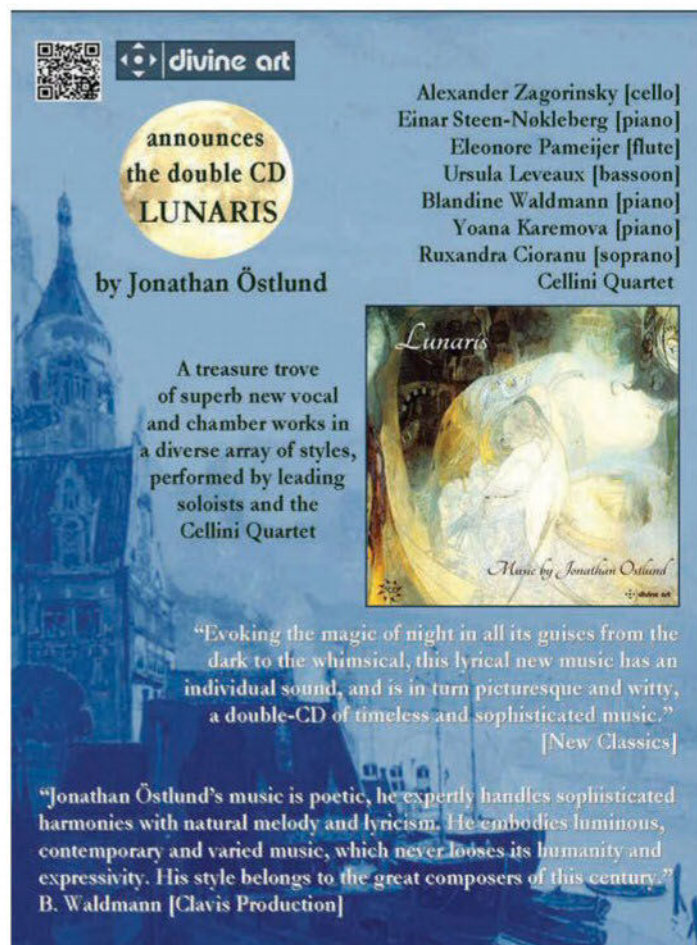
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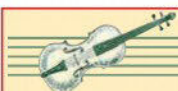
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Sir David Willcocks remembered

I may not be alone in hoping that among the memorials to Sir David Willcocks may be reissues of 'unknown' recordings. If so, some enterprising company might take a critical look at his 1961 rendering of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with the Cambridge University Musical Society. The *Gerontius* is David Galliver, whose distinguished career in the part surely deserves permanent record. The Angel is Norma Procter, more faithful than many of her peers to Elgar's markings, and, as always, offering turns of phrase that make one reflect on how Kathleen Ferrier may have sounded in the part.

Stephen Golding
Abingdon, Oxon, UK

...more

Buying and listening to the Willcocks/King's/Argo recordings at Christmas (reviewed in December, page 93) has seemed entirely appropriate: with five sets of carols included in the set, there was plenty of opportunity to celebrate the season, and also to listen to the progression over 10 years that covered the publication of the first *Carols for Choirs* book, including the Willcocks descants.

I realised that I had entered the choral sound world that my father and his parents would have known in the 1960s, and which informed their approaches to choral music as keen amateurs. As I recall them talking of 'Jesu, priceless treasure' (in English, of course), this would have been the style and recording they had in mind. When I got to sing Allegri's *Miserere* (in English) on Ash Wednesday in the 2000s, our long-standing choirmaster was simply maintaining that tradition.

It has been fascinating to listen to these recordings and recognise the foundations laid for present-day choral music: the *Carols for Choirs* material (a uniquely common repertoire among all choir singers); the rediscovery of a range of music, such as *Spem in alium*; tuning and diction that we take for granted in professional choirs, and seek as amateurs; and clear stylistic choices that may either be adopted or spark fresh alternatives.

While the music can be enjoyed piece by piece, the whole body of work

Letter of the Month



Kirill Petrenko: an advocate for Elgar in Berlin

Russian Elgar

I was glad to read that Andrew Achenbach liked Kirill Petrenko's performance of Elgar's Second Symphony as much as I did ('Performances & Events', January, page 112). I have heard it several times...it is one of those performances that you keep going back to.

It is certainly the equal of the wonderful performance by Vasily Petrenko (no relation, I presume) with the RLPO at the Proms in 2014.

I hope that Onyx issue this soon to complement his excellent recording of the First Symphony (5/15).

There must be something about the Russians and Elgar. Evgeny Svetlanov was a great champion and some years ago I heard a marvellous performance of the *Enigma* Variations by Gennady Rozhdestvensky. Again, Vladimir Ashkenazy recently gave an Elgar series in Sydney.

Tony Williams, via email

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represents a wonderful insight into the development of choral music through the 20th century, and the perfect way to remember Sir David Willcocks.

Jeremy Hill
via email

Weber celebrated

May I echo your correspondent Barry Collett's appreciation (Letters, January) for Jeremy Nicholas's sensitive and

scrupulous discussion of recordings of Weber's *Konzertstück* (November, page 102)? But let me reassure him and your readers that attention to Weber and his music, so far from diminishing, has never been more thorough. The activities of the Internationale Weber-Gesellschaft (webergesellschaft.de) include the annual publication *Weberiana*, with its essays and discussion of subjects of interest including performances, publications and record

reviews, in tandem with the scholarly *Weber-Studien* volumes on subjects such as, recently, his incidental music and concert arias.

The worldwide interest in Weber's music is further shown with the ongoing publication of the new edition, CM von Weber Gesamtausgabe, of all his music, together with his complete writings and letters and his hitherto unpublished diaries. Co-operation is reflected in the recent recording of Weber's early opera *Silvana* (CPO, 7/15) using the new edition. (I happily declare an interest, not just as a Weber biographer but as a member of the board of the Gesellschaft and an editor for the Gesamtausgabe).

John Warrack

Rievaulx, N Yorks, UK

Josef Hofmann

Jeremy Nicholas's 'Icons' article on Josef Hofmann (January, page 58) is very timely, not least in drawing attention – by implication – to the scandalous lack of any authoritative study of this great pianist some 60 years after his death. There was a small book, as I recall – now very rare – which dealt with his first marriage to one Mary Eustis, but that hardly qualifies. I believe there is extensive archival material about him which at one time was part of the International Piano Archive established in New York (now at the University of Maryland) but sadly there is no indication I'm aware of that this is likely to yield a proper account in the near future, which surely an artist of Hofmann's stature deserves. The reasons for this are unclear, though there may of course be, or have been, material in other locations such as the Curtis Institute, where Hofmann taught. Furthermore, his aversion to studio recording and the paucity of live performances of his that are preserved – though here the legacy is better than in the case of Lhévinne and

Rachmaninov, to take two of his contemporaries – add to the historical deficit.

Some years back I did research in the archive of the *New York Times* for reviews of his appearances over a period of 70 years or so, and unless the critics were seriously

misguided he was one of the greatest exponents in history, at least in his prime up to the mid-1930s. Let us hope something is afoot in the shape of a detailed study which will at last serve to establish his place in the pantheon.

John Mallinson

Oxted, Surrey, UK

Sir Alexander Gibson recalled

How nice to read Karen Cargill's brief tribute to Sir Alexander Gibson (Playlist, December, page 118).

To many Scots music lovers of my generation, Sir Alexander was our musical hero. As Musical Director of the Scottish National Orchestra for many years, he brought wonderful music to Scotland, great performances, and many distinguished soloists. As one of the founders of Scottish Opera, he presided over a golden era of performances, for which many of us are profoundly grateful. I still remember his appearing onstage at the end of Scottish Opera's *Ring* cycle of 1971 and being showered with flowers from the audience...in Glasgow! What memories of a great conductor.

Douglas Hamilton

Lamlash, Isle of Arran, UK

In praise of regional orchestras

Perhaps Robert Roy (Letters, January) should visit Liverpool. Vasily Petrenko has often held post-concert CD-signing sessions, always finding time for a few words with everyone. However, I won't be taking up his suggestion of hearing the RLPO on a London date, rather than travelling up to Liverpool from Cornwall.

In recent years I have attended many wonderful concerts in Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester.

Last autumn, for instance, I heard two highly contrasting but equally gripping performances of Mahler's Sixth Symphony in Manchester and Liverpool. Both featured the visually spectacular and sonically terrifying Liverpool hammer (three times in Manchester!) built by one of the RLPO's percussionists and loaned to the Hallé for their performance.

According to Sir Mark Elder's pre-concert talk, they had also provided the exact forces Mahler had ideally requested, including the extraordinary sight and sound of four harps and three celestas: once heard, never forgotten, especially in the Bridgewater Hall's acoustic – better than I've experienced in the capital.

Roger Ainsworth

Penzance, Cornwall, UK

OBITUARIES

A conductor and diplomat; a champion of Mahler's Resurrection Symphony; and a young mezzo



KURT MASUR

Conductor

Born July 18, 1927

Died December 19, 2015

Kurt Masur, former Chief Conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, London Philharmonic and New York Philharmonic, has died at his home in Connecticut: he was 88. Born in Brieg in Germany (now in Poland), Masur studied the piano, composition and conducting in Leipzig. One of his first conducting appointments was at the helm of the Dresden Philharmonic (1955-58, and again 1967-72). In 1970 he was named Kapellmeister of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig, a post he held until 1996.

In 1991 he took over from Zubin Mehta as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic and over the next 10 years galvanised the orchestra, raising standards and giving it back the style it had enjoyed under conductors such as Leonard Bernstein. He left the NYPO in 2002, allegedly following disagreements with the orchestra's Executive Director Deborah Borda. In 2000 he also became Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic, serving until 2008. After leaving the NYPO, he became Music Director of the Orchestre National de France, his last appointment. He was also Honorary Guest Conductor of the Israel Philharmonic, a post named for him for life. His repertoire was remarkably broad and he maintained an impeccable commitment to new music which he programmed with all his ensembles.

Masur achieved considerable international attention, and acclaim,



Josef Hofmann

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when, in 1989, he stepped in and secured an end to a stand-off between protesters and the Communist forces in East Germany, inviting both sides into the Gewandhaus to debate the situation. As a result he was spoken of as a possible candidate for the country's presidency.

Masur recorded primarily for Philips, with some projects for EMI, for most of the Gewandhaus Orchestra period, taping much of the core symphonic literature (including two Beethoven symphony cycles, the Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Mendelssohn symphonies, as well as less often encountered works such as the symphonies of Max Bruch and the complete tone-poems of Liszt). He also recorded for Teldec – his 1992 set of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* (sung in German) with an international line-up of soloists, the Leipzig Radio Choir and the Israel Philharmonic won him a *Gramophone* Award and praise from Alan Blyth, who commented that 'chorus and conductor seem to have struck up an ideal rapport with the Israel Philharmonic, on home ground here in every sense. They play with verve allied to a technical skill capable of keeping up with Masur's exigent demands. In consequence, sections (especially in Part 2) that can seem weak or uninspired in other hands here have a dynamic, driving force that carries all before it. The contribution of all these three elements can be recommended without reservation.' He also conducted for another *Gramophone* Award-winning recording, Jessye Norman's classic Philips account of Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs*.

GILBERT KAPLAN

Mahler expert and conductor

Born March 3, 1941

Died January 1, 2016



Gilbert Kaplan, whose devotion to Mahler, and specifically the Second Symphony, led him to conduct many of the world's great orchestras, has died: he was 75. Having made his fortune by selling the magazine *Institutional Investor*, which he'd founded in 1967, he devoted his time to exploring Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony, a work he'd encountered at a life-changing concert given in 1965 by Leopold Stokowski and the American Symphony Orchestra. 'The music just wrapped its arms around me and never let go,' he told *Gramophone* in December 2003.

He memorised and learnt how to conduct the work – including sessions with Leonard Bernstein and Sir Georg Solti – and in 1982 he conducted the American SO in a private performance at New York's Avery Fisher Hall. Over the next three decades Kaplan conducted Mahler's Second with many of the world's leading orchestras and recorded it twice: once with the LSO for Pickwick and once with the Vienna Philharmonic for DG (employing a new edition he'd made with the Mahler scholar Renate Stark-Voit). His podium skills and technique would remain controversial: orchestral players remained divided, some responding to his passion for the work, others unconvinced of his ability to control an orchestra.

Kaplan's service to Mahler extended beyond performing Mahler's Second and he funded a number of scholarly editions including the facsimile of the symphony, as well as one of the songs, 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen', from Mahler's *Rückert-Lieder*, the score of which he owned.

STELLA DOUFEXIS

Mezzo-soprano

Born January 1, 1968

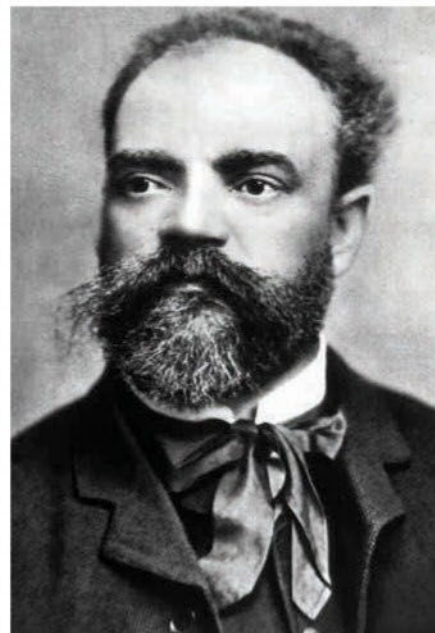
Died December 16, 2015



The Greek-German mezzo-soprano Stella Doufexis has died: she was 47. Born in Frankfurt, she studied in Berlin at the Hochschule der Künste with Ingrid Figur, as well as working with Anna Reynolds. She also attended masterclasses with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Aribert Reimann.

Doufexis was an acclaimed recitalist, oratorio singer and opera performer (in which her roles embraced Cherubino, Dorabella, Octavian and Niklausse as well as modern works such as *Hamlet* by her husband, Christian Jost). She was also a regular recording artist, appearing on, among other projects, Graham Johnson's Schumann series for Hyperion (of which the late Alan Blyth commented that 'in Clara's three songs Doufexis finds just the unforced tone and artless, inward manner to fit their endearing mood'), a Rossini programme and the Fauré song series (also for Hyperion), Mozart's C minor Mass with Peter Dijkstra (Sony Classical), Claudio Abbado's recording of Verdi's *Falstaff* (DG), the Brahms *Liebeslieder-Walzer* (Harmonia Mundi) and a Debussy recital for Berlin Classics. Doufexis also taught at the Robert Schumann University of Music in Düsseldorf.

NEXT MONTH MARCH 2016



Making the case for Dvořák

Dvořák's Cello Concerto is among music's most popular works but his Piano and Violin Concertos are less so – something Stephen Hough and Christian Tetzlaff aim to change, as they explain to Hannah Nepil

Birtwistle and Britain

Thirty years since the premiere of *Earth Dances*, Philip Clark argues that the mid-1980s marked a turning point for British music

Stravinsky's Oedipus rex

Tim Ashley surveys the recordings of Stravinsky's neo-classical opera-oratorio and names the ones to hear

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Alice Cooper

The rock singer on discovering rock'n'roll, his new recording of *Peter and the Wolf*, and how classical music has influenced his own work

As a child I didn't hear any classical music. My dad was a fan of big band music. He liked Frank Sinatra and Jimmy Dorsey. I absolutely loved that music too. Then Elvis came along. I was six or seven years old at the time. One day my uncle, who played guitar, came over to our house and put on this record. It was Chuck Berry. My uncle played along with it and I thought it was the coolest thing ever. So that was my introduction to music. From that point on, rock'n'roll was really my music.

My dad was a preacher but he could tell you who played electric bass for The Animals or who played electric guitar in The Yardbirds. He would listen to The Beatles and The Rolling Stones and say, 'This is really good!' He wasn't one of those guys who said, 'This is the devil's music'.

My first experience of classical music was at junior high school. Everybody had to study the classics – Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and Chopin. Then I met my wife, who was a classical ballerina. She was completely steeped in classical music and ballet so I'd hear a lot of classical music around the house because she was always practising and rehearsing.

You know, Bach, Beethoven and Brahms were the rock stars of their day. They were pretty crazy! They probably did things that were considered outlandish by a lot of their fellow musicians. At the time they were probably considered really avant-garde. But we don't see them like that these days.

There have always been strong operatic elements in my songs. Bob Ezrin, who produced many of my most successful albums, and who also worked with Lou Reed, Pink Floyd and a number of other artists, was classically trained. He added a classical touch to the theatrical ideas I had. My songs had rock-based chord structures but Bob taught us to think classically. He added these classical touches and turned our songs into something different. I liked that. I liked the idea that those things could collide and create something new and refreshing. Great composers will hear something and store it up somewhere in the back of their minds. Then when they're composing, suddenly that line will be in there again, but they won't remember where it came from.

When we recorded albums such as *Welcome to my Nightmare*, Bob Ezrin would come in and add a little bit of Bach here or maybe a phrase from Chopin there. He would play a little piece on piano and say to the musicians in the studio, 'You go play this on electric guitar, you play that on bass guitar'. So suddenly in the middle of this rock song you'd hear something that was classically oriented.



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It has to be the Disney recording for me. The opening theme in low brass is really dark and heavy.

We always used to open our shows with Mussorgsky's *Night on the Bare Mountain*. That music really set things up. You could almost see the old castle on the mountain with the lightning striking. We used to use that music all the time!

Probably every kid in the United States heard *Peter and the Wolf* at school. It was their introduction to classical music. I'd completely forgotten about it until I was invited to narrate *Peter and the Wolf in Hollywood*. Narrating the story was sort of like going back to being seven years old again. It's a modern, up-to-date version of *Peter and the Wolf* – kind of a rock'n'roll take on it. For example, Peter doesn't expect his grandfather to be an old hippie at all, and that kind of gives the story an interesting dynamic.

The National Youth Orchestra of Germany – one of the best youth orchestras in the world – perform the music. In addition to Prokofiev, a whole bunch of other composers are featured, including Wagner, Schumann, Mahler, Elgar and Grieg. The animation is great too. The New York-based production company Giants Are Small built their own cardboard sets and then they filmed the sets with the animations. The set is something in between sculpture, painting, photography and video. It's so cool and really innovative. I'd never seen anybody do it quite like that before. **G**
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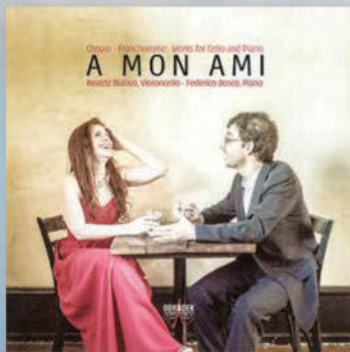
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BBC Music Magazine Erik Levi - March 2015



Beatriz Blanco, cello & Federico Bosco, piano

A mon ami

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Brillante, Cello Sonata

Chopin-Franchomme - Grand Duo from
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